Marxism Today

Theoretical and Discussion Journal of the Communist Party January 1977 35 pence

Editorial Comments

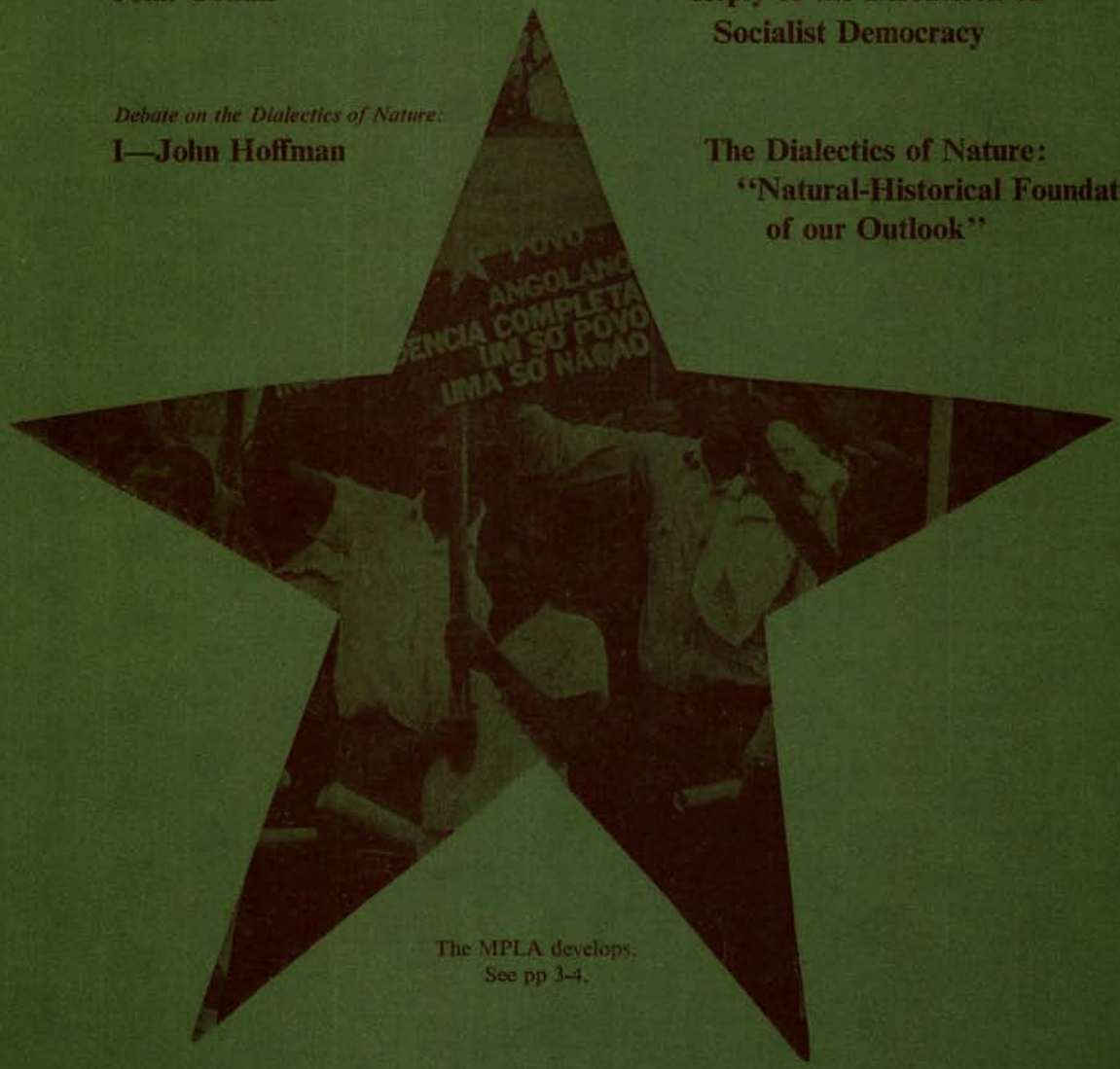
John Gollan

Reply to the Discussion on Socialist Democracy

Debate on the Dialectics of Nature:

I—John Hoffman

The Dialectics of Nature: "Natural-Historical Foundation of our Outlook"



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James Harvey — *Theories of Inflation*

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Marxism Today

Theoretical and Discussion Journal of the Communist Party

Volume 21, Number 1

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The front cover was designed by Pat Cook

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Editorial Comments

A MANIFESTO on Freedom and Democracy was adopted on July 30, 1976, at the 13th Extraordinary Congress of the Communist Party of Japan.

The Manifesto was divided into four sections:

(1) The Crisis of Freedom and Democracy; (2) Japanese Democracy—Past and Present; (3) Questions of Scientific Socialism and Freedom; and, (4) For the Winning of Developed and Flourishing Freedom and Democracy.

The first section examined the attacks on democracy developing under the reactionary Liberal-Democratic Government. The people have the right to enjoy three freedoms—the freedom of existence ("the freedom of man to live"); civil and political freedom; and the freedom of the nation—all of which are under attack by monopoly capitalism. The right to live was threatened by the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small group, by the character of the social services, by inflation and unemployment, the crisis of the environment, the heavy rate of accidents.

Civil and political rights were also under heavy attack—rights like the freedom of thought, speech, creed, workshop liberties, trade union organisation, by proposals for legislation that would curtail parliamentary democracy.

The freedom of the Japanese nation, above all its right of self-determination, was threatened by the military alliance between Japan and the United States.

PAST AND PRESENT OF JAPANESE DEMOCRACY

The second section of the Manifesto describes the very specific character of the development of freedom and democracy in Japan.

Unlike the West European capitalist countries, the Japanese ruling bourgeoisie "did not become the bearer of democratic demands", but the promoter of suppression of freedom and democracy since its early days under the absolutist Tenno (Emperor) system.

The Meiji Restoration (1868) overthrew the Tokugawa family's feudal Shogonate Government and initiated a rapid capitalist development *from above*. Meanwhile with rapidly developing capitalism, the Tenno system strengthened its absolutist military-political rule. Giant financial groups (Zaibatsu) together with great landowners supported the Tenno system, encouraged militarism and aggressive wars, attacked freedom and democracy.

In such a very specific historical situation, the struggle in Japan for freedom and democracy fell on the shoulders of the progressive and revolutionary people, particularly upon those of the working class and its party:

> "Thus the main bearers of freedom and democracy were socialist movements, and also trade unions and peasant movements of a class nature."

The Communist Party of Japan, formed in 1922, succeeded to this tradition of the struggle for freedom and democracy. In the early days the Party itself suffered ruthless oppression, struggled in illegality, but after World War II the character of the struggle changed.

The defeated ruling circles of Japan had to agree to "democratisation".

> "The people, who were forced to regard the Tenno (Emperor) as divine and his absolutist rule as 'national polity' before and during the war and who had long suffered from tyranny, deprived of rights, now came to take part in movements for the democratisation and freedom of Japan. The CPJ, which had for the first time obtained freedom for open activity, took the lead in the movement."

SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM AND DEMOCRACY

The third section outlines the theoretical approaches of Marx, Engels and Lenin to the question of democracy, the relation of the struggle for democracy to the struggle for socialism.

When, with the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, socialist society first began to be built, the victory brought many advances but also problems:

> "Victory of the Russian October Revolution, led by Lenin, marked an epoch-making first step, and, during the past half century a series of socialist revolutions were won in a series of countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America. Thus socialist

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societies began to be built. . . . Contrary to the expectation of Marx and Engels, socialist revolutions were first victorious, not in advanced capitalist countries, but in comparatively backward capitalist countries and . . . these countries had to advance towards socialism with their own specific difficulties of socialist construction in politics, economy and culture, and in the difficult international situation of danger of siege and aggression by imperialism. These facts gave rise to many complicated features in the developing process of socialism."

The fact that there have been errors in the advance to socialism in the particular circumstances of some socialist countries does not mean that these must inevitably re-occur:

"Obviously it is a basic error to deny the original stand of scientific socialism aiming at the full blooming of freedom and democracy, on the ground of various negative phenomena that took place in specific socialist countries during these years. It is a gross error to make an analogy between the socialist future of a developed capitalist country like Japan and the specific realities of the existing socialist countries, which started under different historical conditions and were formed in an entirely different environment.

"The Communist Party of Japan repeats that it will not make a model of the experiences of any foreign countries like the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China. As a consistent defender of the freedom and democracy of the people it will correctly inherit the original stand of scientific socialism; it will seek a creative development of socialism under the condition of a highly developed capitalist country —Japan—and it will continue to pursue its own specific way, hand-in-hand with the people, to an independent democratic Japan and thence to a socialist Japan."

FOR A DEVELOPED AND FLOURISHING FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY

The fourth section of the Manifesto puts forward a perspective of a continued process of extending democracy as part of struggle for an independent democratic Japan through an anti-imperialist and anti-monopoly democratic revolution, advancing to a socialist and eventually a Communist society:

"From the standpoint of supporting sovereignty resting on the people, a democratic state system will be established and firmly maintained with the Diet (Parliament), based upon universal suffrage, as the supreme organ of the State in name and reality, both in the independent democratic and the socialist Japan.

"A multi-party system, including opposition parties, will be adopted, in which freedom of activities will be guaranteed for all parties; and the party or coalition of parties winning support from the majority of the people will hold the reins of government. . . ."

Examining the future of civil rights, the Manifesto proclaims:

"Freedom of speech, the press and other forms of expression, including the guarantee of unrestricted use of paper and printing, will be defended. Censorship will be rejected. Freedom of the press, including criticism against a Government, will be guaranteed for the press, including newspapers, radio and television. . . ."

"The right of collective action, including freedom of assembly and parade, freedom of association, right of organisation, right of strike and collective bargaining, will be fully defended. Meeting halls and other facilities necessary for exercising these rights will be furnished more completely. . . ."

"Freedom of thought and creed, and freedom of conscience of individuals will be completely guaranteed. Intervention by public authority in the spiritual life of the people will be rejected and any discrimination due to difference in thought and creed will be eliminated. No world outlook will be made a 'state philosophy' . . . ."

"Freedom of religion, including that of propagation and missionary work, will be unconditionally guaranteed . . .

"Freedom of academic research as well as that of cultural and artistic activities including creation, criticism, publication and appreciation will be guaranteed. . . .

"Equality and equal rights for men and women will be defended in all fields. . . ."

The Manifesto ends with a clear perspective for the freedom of the Japanese, and for all, nations. Every nation must have the opportunity independently to choose the social and political institutions of its own country, to exercise its sovereignty:

"This is the inherent right possessed by every nation and is the indispensable condition for a free development of a nation. It is the most important national task for the Japanese people to firmly restore the right of national self-determination, and to fight against those who infringe this right to defend the freedom of the Japanese nation. . . .

"To defend the right of self-determination of one's own nation and defend the right of other nations is inseparable."

RICHARD CROSSMAN ON THE STATE

The second volume of Richard Crossman's Diaries[1] concentrates mainly on the internal struggles in the 1966-68 Labour Cabinet. It does not, therefore, deal in anything like the same detail as the first volume with the role, power and machinations of the "Whitehall mandarins". Nevertheless, it contains more than sufficient to illustrate what a powerful, reactionary and anti-democratic force "Whitehall" really is.

A conversation which Crossman had with the Queen after a Privy Council meeting offers a suitable starting point:

"The Queen said 'I see the Labour Party is beginning to admit that civil servants sometimes conceal

[1] Crossman Diaries, Vol II, Hamish Hamilton & Jonathan Cape, £9.50.

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> things from politicians and are difficult to manage[2]. I should have thought they always did what they were told'. I said 'I am afraid that's not true' and she then said 'How do you know?'. 'Well, Evelyn Sharp was my Permanent Secretary (volume I recounts the constant battles waged by Evelyn Sharp to impose the Officials' policy on Crossman)".

The Queen's assumptions were somewhat undermined when Crossman discovered that the power of the officials extended beyond "Whitehall" to the functions of Parliament itself.

"There is an official level here in Parliament" he notes, "just as important as the one in Whitehall. . . . I wonder if it is really true that here in the Palace of Westminster the business is settled by the officials working together while the politicians come and go."

In another place he quotes from his own experience to prove how the officials doctor the Minutes of Cabinet meetings to suit their own ends:

> "The Cabinet Minutes merely attributed to me the brief (prepared by his officials) which I took with me but of which I didn't read a single line because I knew that it was unsuitable. The official Minutes even changed the order of the items on the Agenda so that they agreed with the brief. . . . I record this because it is important to remember how little historians can trust Cabinet Minutes to tell them what really went on. What they do tell is what went on according to the officials and the official briefs".

He records what he said to the Fulton Commission:

> "I then went on to Treasury domination, how the Treasury spies on Ministers through ex-Treasury men in each department, how difficult civil servants find it not to feel a greater loyalty to the Treasury than to their minister and I then described the difficulty of a minister faced with the agreed solutions of official committees."

"THE EXECUTIVE RIDES SUPREME"

Commenting on the Treasury's typical approaches, Crossman describes the measures proposed to meet the economic crisis:

> "They wanted to see school meal prices doubled, to transfer most of the cost to the consumer; a charge for each visit to the doctor of 2/6d and thirdly, a very considerable postponement of the decision to relate the level of old age pensions either to the cost of living or to average earnings".

Towards the end of 1966, he recounts elsewhere, Peggy Herbison, Minister of Social Security, had been waging a struggle in the Cabinet for an increase in family allowances and had met with opposition. It was agreed that both sides should prepare papers for discussion, that a final decision should be arrived at at a special cabinet meeting early in 1967, and that, pending this, there might be an interim concession. The Minister prepared her paper and sent it in but, as she informed Crossman, there was no acknowledgment. Week after week the Treasury delayed until it was too late for any interim concession. She threatened to resign, but was dissuaded.

Summing it all up and exposing the limitations both of Parliament and the government in relation to Whitehall, he says:

> "Ministers aren't bothered by Parliament, indeed they are hardly ever there. (They have) many other worries . . . the Executive rides supreme in Britain and has minimum trouble from the legislature".

Crossman makes repeated reference to the power of Sir Burke Trend, Cabinet Secretary, and his close relationship with and influence over Harold Wilson. "Burke is now the most powerful of the Prime Minister's confidants and has got Harold tightly integrated into the Whitehall set-up. . . . He (Wilson) is more anchored right in the centre with only vestiges of the vague leftism which he brought with him to the job. In this change in his state of mind Burke has played a very big part". He describes "the essence of this government" as a Wilson-Burke Trend "axis".

IMPORTANT DECISIONS OF THE MPLA

At a plenary meeting of its Central Committee from October 23-29 last year, the first to be held since the expulsion of the South African invading forces earlier in that year, the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) decided that a vanguard Party of the working class should be created, based on Marxism-Leninism, and that this should be the main task of an MPLA Congress to be held no later than the third quarter of 1977.

MPLA stressed that it had opted for the socialist road for Angola, and that a working class party was essential if socialism was to be built. Ideological clarity was necessary and an understanding of social classes and the problem of class alliances.

Confronting the problem of the state in Angola, the MPLA Central Committee

[2] She is referring to the evidence presented to the Fulton Commission on the Civil Service by the Labour Party.

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defined this as "Lay, democratic and one of national unity. Its leadership belongs to the working class, allied to the peasantry and to other labouring classes, which should maintain all social classes and strata without exception under its orientation and leadership, promoting unity with patriotic forces among the middle classes, revolutionary intellectuals and students".

The most important feature in the content of the Angola state apparatus was its role:

> "as the most responsible centre for the planning and leadership of the national economy, considered as a whole. . . . A similar responsibility is alien to a capitalist-oriented state where the national economy is subjected to the designs of the international monopolies and the greed of the exploiting classes.
>
> The building of socialism embraces all spheres of activity. It includes not only political and economic transformations, but also, and in a very special form, the ideological transformation of men, who are marked, to a greater or lesser degree, by the alienating influence of colonialism. The MPLA Central Committee is convinced that a task so immense and so complex requires a qualitatively new state machine, endowed with institutions and mechanisms which respond to the specific demands of the present stage, and point the actions towards the highest objectives of our socialist choice".

The MPLA, therefore, has embarked on the task of planning the economy, and establishing an overall National Planning Commission. At the same time MPLA has determined to continue the task of institutionalising the organs of Popular Power—bodies of direct democracy, immediately responsible to the local populations. So far these bodies have only been institutionalised in the capital, Luanda, with elections held earlier in the year: MPLA intends to repeat this process throughout the country, as and when conditions are ripe.

Documents from this important MPLA Central Committee meeting will be available in a forthcoming issue of *People's Power*, the bi-monthly magazine of the Mozambique, Angola and Guiné Information Centre, available from MAGIC, 12, Little Newport Street, London, W.C.2.

CONFERENCE ON "CLASS AND CLASS STRUCTURE"

The massive response to the conference, organised by the Communist Party Sociology Group and *Marxism Today* on the theme of "Class and Class Structure" held on November 27-28, attests to the importance of the Marxist theory of class. Over 380 attended, a further 350 applications had to be returned, and hundreds of telephone inquirers were

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disappointed to learn that there were no more tickets available.

Undoubtedly the presence of Nicos Poulantzas was an exciting and important event for British Marxists. Poulantzas spoke as a member of the Communist Party of Greece (Interior). He defended his thesis that the working class is composed of "productive labourers"; with all other wage-earners in commercial, service, technical and state employment being members of the "new petty bourgeoisie" and being aligned ideologically and politically to the "traditional petty bourgeoisie".

This thesis was opposed by Alan Hunt who argued that all wage-earners are potentially members of the working class, and that it is their political and ideological relation to other classes that determines whether or not the unity of the working class in class struggle is realised. He argued that the distinction between productive and unproductive labour does not reveal any fundamental distinction between different types of labour sufficient to justify allocating them to separate classes. Vic Allen argued that it is necessary to analyse the differentiation of the working class in order to grasp the different forms of class practices in which the various sections of the working class engage.

The conference also tackled broader problems and much attention was focused upon the different political and strategic implications of the differing views on class. The adoption of "broad" or "narrow" identifications of the working class suggest different political strategies. A broad view focuses attention on the problem of realising the unity of the working class, while a narrow view focuses upon the problem of alliances between the working class and other classes.

These questions gave rise to much vigorous discussion about the relation between the economic level on the one hand and politics and ideology on the other. Paul Hirst argued that, although Poulantzas sought to give some relative autonomy to politics and ideology in the determination of classes and of class struggle, in the final analysis his insistence that economics was determinant amounted to the reduction of politics and ideology to the economic level. His suggestion that Marxists needed to recognise the necessary non-correspondence between the economic, and the political and ideological produced much controversy.

Stuart Hall provided a very thorough analysis of the different aspects of Marx's theory of class; Jean Gardiner tackled the problem of the relation of women to class formation and the need for the Marxist theory of class to embrace the role of women, not directly engaged in production, in the necessary process of the reproduction of labour power and social relations. John Westergaard tackled the question of class as a mechanism of social distribution with its attendant inequalities and also criticised the theory of corporatism which presents the expanding role of the state as producing a new form of society mid-way between capitalism and socialism.

Readers will be interested to know that the proceedings of the conference are to be published as a book by Lawrence and Wishart, to be edited by Alan Hunt. The wider availability of these debates should assist in the ongoing discussion of the important theoretical and political questions involved.

LAWRENCE AND WISHART—FORTHCOMING 1977

December 1976 was an active month for Lawrence and Wishart with the publication of three new books—the second (concluding) volume of Yvonne Kapp's biography of *Eleanor Marx*; an important political analysis by the French Communist historian Jean Elleinstein—"The Stalin Phenomenon"; and a study of the theories of causes and cures of capitalist crisis—*Underconsumption Theories* —by Michael Bleaney.

Also in December was a reprint of one of the literary landmarks of the 'thirties—*Towards Standards of Criticism*, with a new introduction by F. R. Leavis.

The Lawrence and Wishart 1977 programme starts off with a new volume of the political writings of Antonio Gramsci—one of a number of works of or about Italian Marxists to be published during the year. Among these will be a book introducing an Italian Marxist little known in Britain—*An Introduction to the Thoughts of Galvano Della Volpe*—by John Fraser—and also a translation of Della Volpe's *Rousseau and Marx.*

Early in the programme will be a volume of papers from the 1976 Communist University of London on problems like class, hegemony and party, and another volume of the papers of the successful conference on *Class and Class Structure* organised last November by the Sociology Group of the Communist Party and *Marxism Today*.

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Among important books on current political problems will be *The Armed Forces and Politics* by Jack Woddis.

A new edition of Maurice Cornforth's *The Open Philosophy and the Open Society* will appear shortly with a fresh introduction on Karl Popper (to whose attacks on Marxism the book replies) and with an added section on "The Conduct and Aims of Marxist Political Parties". Maurice Cornforth is also working on a series of books under the general title of *Thinking and Being: Studies for the Philosophy of Communism*, of which the first volume—*Logical Foundations for Philosophy*—will be published in 1977.

Several books on cultural themes will be published in 1977, two of them on music—*The Masonic Thread in Mozart*, by Katherine Thomson, and *Early English Music* by Ernst Meyer (a completely new edition of his classic work *English Chamber Music*)—together with *Literature, the Individual and Society* by Raymond Southall; *William Morris and the New Art* by John Hanna; and *Decay and Renewal: Critical Essays on 20th Century Writing* by Jack Lindsay.

With these, there will be a translation of *Proudhon, Marx and Picasso* by Max Raphael, whose attitude to art criticism might be said to parallel that prescribed by Walter Benjamin for the truly revolutionary writer. John Tagg will provide an introduction as well as a bibliography for the book.

The cause of freedom will be upheld by a reprint of the *Handbook of Freedom*, first compiled in the 'thirties, with an introduction by Edgell Rickword; in another way by a long-awaited book on *Sean O'Casey*, by C. Desmond Greaves, and also by a volume of historical essays by Christopher Hill and others on *Rebels and their Causes*, which is being prepared in honour of A. L. Morton, author of *A People's History of England.*

Planned for publication also is a volume on the history of the South Wales Miners, *From Defeat to Vindication*, treating the period from the General Strike in 1926 to Nationalisation in 1945.

DEUTSCHER MEMORIAL PRIZE AWARD

The members of the Jury of the Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize—Perry Anderson, E. H. Carr, Tamara Deutscher, Eric Hobsbawm, Monty Johnstone, Ralph Miliband and John Westergaard—have announced that the prize for 1976 to the value of £100 has been awarded to Professor Wlodzimierz Brus for his book *Socialist Ownership and Political Systems*, which was published last year by Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Professor Wlodzimierz Brus taught at the Warsaw School of Planning and Statistics and at the University of Warsaw until his dismissal in March 1968. He had, from 1956-1958, been the Director of the Research Institute of the Polish Planning Commission; and he was from 1957-1961 the Vice Chairman of the Polish Economic Council. He has, since 1973, been attached to St. Antony's College, Oxford. His other works translated in English include *The Market in a Socialist Economy* and *On the Economics and Politics of Socialism*, also published by Routledge & Kegan Paul. Professor Brus has given the Isaac Deutscher Memorial Lecture on the subject of 'Polish October—Twenty Years After'.

The Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize for 1977 will be awarded in the autumn of 1977 and a jury drawn from among the sponsors will be glad to consider work published or in typescript. Any such works should be submitted by May 1, 1977 to the Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize, c/o Lloyds Bank, 68 Warwick Square, London, SW1.

COMMUNIST PARTY BOOKSALES

LIBRARY — PRINT COLLECTION — ARCHIVE

The next second-hand book and pamphlet sale of the Communist Party will be held on **Wednesday, March 9th, 1977 at 5.15 at 27 Bedford Street, London, W.C.2.**

Proceeds from this sale will go to the National Party Fund which closes on March 14th, 1977 and therefore donations of material of every description are urgently needed. Everything is sorted carefully and used to supplement library and archive before the surplus is placed on sale, and therefore not only books and pamphlets but posters, leaflets, cuttings etc. are all welcome.

The sale will be wide-ranging, offering titles of interest not only to students and collectors but also to the general reader, including fiction, journals, paperbacks, Marxist classics, labour history, art books, Left Book Club titles.

Phone 01-836 2151 for further details.

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Reply to the Discussion on Socialist Democracy

John Gollan

What I write is more a rejoinder than a reply. For discussion on this great subject will continue despite our closing this particular discussion in *Marxism Today*. In addition, in the course of the debate various points I might otherwise have dealt with have been covered by other contributors, and don't need to be repeated.

The Main Points

Having studied the various contributions carefully, I cannot find that they either seriously challenge or undermine the main points in the first part of my article that went beyond the analysis of the 20th Congress resolution on the subject, although I have been helped in my thoughts on these matters by a number of contributions.

As a year has passed since the article was written, these main points bear summarising again. My case was that Stalin and those associated with him systematically departed from the critical issues of the further development of the revolution charted by Lenin. This was particularly so concerning the conception and role of the Party. Up to 1930, debate and opposition was still open in the Party, although there was a growth of factionalism. But then all different views started to be treated as deviations, with the implication that they were counter-revolutionary.

Stalin's monolithic conception of the Party (a phrase not used by Lenin in the 1920s) became increasingly identified with conformism and administrative rather than political methods. On the state, problems which arose through bureaucratic methods and lack of self-criticism were increasingly attributed to the enemies of socialism. There was growing use of repression, while always stating that such use was auxiliary. And two really vital points: the crucial and major importance Lenin accorded to the independent role of the trade unions in soviet society were ignored and their independent role was finally eliminated. Lenin's strong views that the security organs be kept within the process of socialist law were ignored.

So, great progress there was, but on this basis of gross deformation, which reached its height on the eve of the Second World War when the (justifiable) increased powers of the security organs were turned against the Party. My general conclusion was that for these organs to reach such a position of lawless arbitrary power could only be explained by the fact that the Party which could have prevented this was not acting as it should. It was gravely undermined by the ways Stalin had constricted and distorted the development of the Party, the state and popular initiatives and control, and the fact that the democratic checks on the security organs envisaged by Lenin were never applied.

Mark Harrison (June) supplied valuable and cogent additional points with which I largely agree, to this analysis, as well as indicating some inadequacies in it.

The 'Inevitability' Theory

Those generally hostile to the main line of argument in the article don't really attempt to deal with the points of my analysis. The result is that some of them land straight into the 'inevitability' theory in part or in whole.

Thus Kenneth Brinson (April), dealing with the harsh objective background against which these events took place (which I agree cannot be overstressed), comes to the conclusion "that some arbitrary tendencies manifested themselves is hardly surprising". I'm afraid that it was more than a matter of "tendencies". The most extreme case is Peter Hall (August) with his argument that the cult was a phenomenon arising out of and not imposed upon society and that "the particular form it took in the Soviet Union was a concrete expression of a tendency inherent in every mass revolutionary movement". This line of argument is not only totally un-Marxist, but of course contradicts the analysis of the CPSU resolution on the cult. Can it be that the writer sees no way to revolution except that imposed from above, as it were, by compulsion?

Bob Morrison disagrees with the inevitability argument, but writes that Stalin was a figure of gigantic proportions and not all the crimes can be laid at his door. Quite true. And my article made that clear, but as to his major responsibility there can be no question.

John Tarver (July) writes that to dismiss the 20th Congress simply as the exposure of the crimes of Stalin would be a travesty. I agree; that is why

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I did not do this. I hope, however, that he is not trying to suggest that the multi-volumed history of the CPSU he refers to throws the necessary historical light on the cult, its origins and its evolution. It does not. But this task will have to be done one day.

Party and State

Dennis Ogden's contribution (April) was valuable in carrying the argument back to the very earliest days of the revolution. It was particularly interesting to show that what was being wrestled with was the very nature of the evolving socialist democracy, the relations of state and party, freedom—all the critical points. His conclusion is that the theoretical and political problem of the relation of party and state has not been solved to this day. After dealing with the developments since the 20th Congress, I wrote: "We seem to lack a worked-out theoretical treatment of this position and the relative functions of party and state."

Does this question and its evolution still merit attention in the USSR today? It was noteworthy that the 25th Congress of the CPSU remarked on the need for deeper study of the state. It also decided to draft a new Soviet Constitution for discussion which, amongst other things, will cover the "basic features of a developed socialist society and its political organisation". Really serious work on this question will include a restatement or reassessment of Soviet economic, political and social institutions.

While sympathising with many of Graham Taylor's interesting points (September), I cannot accept them in their entirety. He writes that I portray Lenin very much as a victim of circumstances but do not accord this same point to Stalin, and that the deep-rooted authoritarian trends in Russian history must be taken into account. With the latter point I completely agree. It's on the first that I demur. Surely the issue here is what political policies and lines of development Lenin and Stalin in the respective periods were advancing and seeking to implement.

Nor do I find the prophetic Rosa Luxemburg quotations used in a relevant context. She was making the points in 1918. It was precisely at that time that Lenin was battling for the pluralist elements then present in the revolution, expressed in the various working-class parties which then existed (with the Bolshevik-Left SR alliance), the debate over the respective roles of party and state, regular elections, the role of the unions, and so on. It was at this time that Lenin made the speech to the railwaymen, referred to by Monty Johnston (October) in his contribution: "If the working class are dissatisfied with their party, they can elect other delegates, hand power to another party,

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and change the government without any revolution at all", adding that the bourgeois parties were relatively blocked and incapable of action. Why all this changed and events took the precise course they did, I attempted, however inadequately, to deal with in my article.

It seems to me that George Bridges's criticisms (November) require two comments. He puts as the "central aspect of Stalinist theory" the role of the Communist Party in the socialist political system. One could well make the same point in relation to Lenin. Surely, however, the issue is that of Stalin's deformations and distortions of the role of the Party both in the Soviet Union and in the countries of Eastern Europe. The questions arising (and to which I will return) are the further development of the conception of the role of the Party and of debate and differences within it, and in the state and all public bodies in the USSR.

Need for Principled Discussion

I hope that his examination of these Soviet authors is not taken to suggest that the single party road to socialism is the official CPSU view for all countries and all Communist Parties. This is not so. (By the way, I agree that where more than one party exists in a socialist country it should have real political existence and not be a sham.) All the parties in Western Europe spelled out their particular strategies for socialist revolution at the recent European Conference of Parties, and most of them involved the concept of political pluralism. All this was noted by Brezhnev, who said, fairly enough, that experience would be the ultimate test, but adding that even before then "there is the opportunity and need for testing such propositions in comradely discussion . . .". In his contribution Berlinguer suggested such discussions should be extended to cover the problems of socialist democracy.

My own view is that nothing but mutual good could come out of serious and principled discussion. This is an entirely different question from that of the independence of parties, their sovereign rights to decide their own policy, and the principle of non-interference in one another's affairs.

Sid French in his contribution (December) had his chance for a serious exposition of his views on the Stalin era and on the development of socialist democracy against the views I advanced. But he does nothing of the kind. The Party is denied an exposition of his views. Surely this is to be regretted. Instead, we get his familiar analysis of the Party's present problems, which is properly the province of the discussion which will precede this year's Party Congress and on the new draft of *The British Road to Socialism*.

This applies to a degree, too, to Fergus Nicholson's contribution. But this contribution is somewhat different, of course. He, too, simply refuses to discuss the issues raised in my article. His contribution serves a different purpose, a general dismissal of Communist Parties in Western Europe as revisionist and in danger of becoming quasi-Labour Parties. His major authority here is a long quotation from a *Times* editorial. But even in this respect the author's nerve seems to fail him, for he writes these parties "may yet disappoint the editor of *The Times*". No one is under any illusions regarding the problems facing the Italian and French Parties, who, in unity with the socialists, have made such an important advance in Europe that US imperialism sees this as a challenge to its domination in Europe. But political cowardice and class collaboration have never been a failing of French and Italian Communists. These parties have advanced comprehensive strategies of socialist change in their countries, on which there can be differences. If the writer had advanced some concrete alternative strategy for these parties, we could examine his criticism. But he does not, so his points become mere vilification.

Again in relation to the theoretical discussion on the Dictatorship of the Proletariat taking place in these and other parties, if the author had subjected their points to critical examination, fair enough. But he doesn't do so.

Regarding our strategy for socialist revolution and the winning of political power, this whole question will be opened up for discussion with the publication of the new draft of *The British Road to Socialism*. In view of this, to say that my article was an attempt to prejudice this is nonsense.

Developing Socialist Democracy

Most of those opposing the general position of the article simply avoid real discussion about the points I made regarding the further development of socialist democracy.

Again to summarise. I asked for consideration of even greater participation in *decision-making* as the main issue, not only involving the Party, but also the masses. Involved in this was the real possibility of the expression of different estimates, solutions and dissenting views, and further public expression of these views. In other words, what was involved was the interplay of the central direction of the state with the fullest possible participation in decision-making from below. I suggested there should be greater expression of all this in the Party Congress; and whether there could be greater public ventilation of big issues in the CC and PB preceding leadership changes. On dissent in general, I questioned the use of the law of libel and slander of the socialist *state* as

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such; raised the issue of possible self-publication and a legal means of access to the Soviet public of those with different views on socialist policy.

John Tarver attacks me for not dealing with what came up at the 25th Congress on these issues, an impossible request as my article was published some eight weeks before the Congress.

Certainly, again in my view, the 25th Congress represents a measure of progress. The further development of inner-party democracy was stressed, the importance of letters to the Central Committee, and of criticism and self-criticism.

Again the need for further development of socialist democracy was stressed in the increased work of the standing committees, increased power for local Soviets. All this is important, but it appears to me that there is no fundamental new departure which the increasingly complex and educated nature of Soviet society demands. The points were very much at the level of administrative democracy, but not decision-making democracy.

The Problem of Dissent

But on the handling of so-called dissent there was no change at all, which will be approved by my critics. Kenneth Brinson writes that "dissenters are not tried for their views, but for their actions" (a point well dealt with by Monty Johnstone). In the Soviet press, Brinson goes on: "Falsehoods, distortions and malicious campaigning are justly debarred"—so he prejudges all criticism. John Tarver suggests there must have been hours of discussion before administrative action was taken, to which one could say: "Does this justify administrative action?"

Finally, the argument reaches the stage where Les Howey (October) writes that it is my belief that "the media of a socialist society must give access to racists and fascists". On this latter note of calculated misrepresentation we almost despair of rational discussion.

By the way, the Soviet press does, in fact, make frequent references to Sakharov, etc., but never 'straight'—always in the form of attack.

The point at issue, of course, is not what I want published. It is what is the correct principle of socialist democracy. I hold that in the USSR there must be some legal means of expression of dissent and until this is found we will have a constantly running sore. The present method of handling these matters is not only manifestly faulty, but is a gift to every anti-Soviet agency. I'm sure that this will come. The sooner it comes, the better and the stronger socialist society will be. The same applies to other socialist countries.

Look at the recent eruption over prices in Poland showing an obvious breakdown or absence of democratic discussion and mass participation in decision-making. Poland can't go on "solving" questions by eruption; the society demands the democratic evolution of political and state forms.

Then it is suggested (Dorothy Friedman) that we should not forget that in this period imperialism's main weapon is ideological subversion. True enough, but how does one face this? By ideological confrontation and not pussyfooting and mollicoddling of the Soviet public as if they were incapable of facing such attempted subversion as she seems to suggest. Discussion of great issues can strengthen the battle against imperialist subversion.

Reuben Falber answered Ralph Russell's points regarding our own Party practices.

Finally, the issue comes up, how does one define the Stalin issue, and on this Mark Harrison makes some tentative points, and so does Alan Hunt in a more definite way (December).

I, as has been pointed out, don't use the word 'Stalinism' or on that basis seek to set out categories to substantiate the claim that it is an 'ism'. At this stage, at least, I cannot add to what I have already done.

The Key to Further Development

There was one point in the CPSU resolution that bears repetition again and again. That is, the basic nature of the social system was not changed despite all the deformations. The Russian Revolution not only changed Russia, it has been a major motive force for our whole changing world. The Soviet people, the Soviet Party, did not support their system because of terror and repression. They supported it because they so passionately believed in it, they were prepared to fight and die for the system. Surely this is the key to understanding the inner viability of the system and its inherent strength and forces that could put things right.

This is the key to its further development, not only its still greater economic strides, its role for peace and progress in the world, but in its political institutions.

Discussion on
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Debate on the Dialectics of Nature

I—The Dialectics of Nature: "The Natural-Historical Foundation of our Outlook"

John Hoffman

(*The author is a politics lecturer at the University of Leicester. His book,* Marxism and the Theory of Praxis, *was published last year by Lawrence & Wishart.*)

Author's note: *This is an expanded version of a paper presented to the Communist University of London (CUL 8) as part of a debate on the dialectics of nature between myself and Richard Gunn. In reworking the paper for* Marxism Today, *I have been able to draw upon the extremely stimulating discussion from the floor which the debate aroused.*

The Importance of the Debate

A debate around the question of the dialectics of nature is one of considerable importance, for it is worth posing the question: what are the issues at stake? Is the discussion merely one of interest to academic philosophers or should it be of concern to communists and marxists in general?

In my view, what is at stake is nothing less than what Marx himself described as "the natural-historical foundation of our outlook",[1] or, as he put it elsewhere (also with reference to the importance of Darwin's *Origin of the Species*), "the natural scientific basis of the class struggle in history".[2]

For this, in a nutshell, is what the dialectics of nature is all about: whether our understanding of "the class struggle in history" is to be coherently linked to and theoretically rooted in a scientific understanding of the world of nature or whether it is merely to rest upon arbitrary assumptions, with all the cynicism and danger that that necessarily implies.

For the nub of the argument which I wish to present may be stated as follows: that dialectics as a theory stands or falls *as a whole*. A theory of dialectics which does not reflect and cannot explain the movement of both nature *and* society is a theory which cannot provide an adequate or consistent basis for Marxist philosophy, for without a concept of the dialectic rooted in nature itself, Marxism becomes a brittle and eclectic world-outlook, riddled with dualism and therefore, as a result, compromised by idealist philosophical thought.

This, it must be stressed, is no mere "academic" misfortune. It is an extremely serious matter, for, as Marx and Engels have shown when they examined the impact of the division of labour on the development of philosophy, idealist conceptions of the universe express an exploitative world outlook. They continue to be held by those who either uncritically accept or cannot look beyond the division of society into antagonistic classes.[3]

In other words, the debate about the dialectics of nature is not merely a debate about philosophy, it is also a *political* debate, for a Marxism without the dialectics of nature is a Marxism which has ceased to be a consistently revolutionary outlook. This is why a debate around the dialectics of nature should be of interest and concern to Marxists everywhere.

[1] Letter to Engels, December 19, 1860, in *Werke* 30 (Dietz Verlag, Berlin), p. 418.

[2] Letter to Lassalle, January 16, 1861, in *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow/London, 1953), p. 151.

[3] See in particular Marx and Engels's comments in *The German Ideology* (Moscow/London, 1964), p. 43.

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The debate itself is not new, and ever since Marx noted that in its *rational* form dialectics "is a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors",[4] a consistent theory of dialectics (which must include the world of nature) has been under attack. In the 1870s Eugen Dühring complained that "the so-called dialectical principle" had been "borrowed from the theology of the Revelation and from mysticism",[5] while Eduard Bernstein, in his famous revisionist critique of Marxism, threw out the concept of a *universal* dialectics on the grounds that the "struggle of opposites" was not "the basis of all development", but that "the co-operation of related forces is of great significance as well"[6]—a plea for "moderation" and "conciliation" which admirably mirrored the opportunism of his political practice!

George Lukacs himself commented that the erroneous position adopted on the dialectics of nature in his *History and Class Consciousness* (first published in 1919) fell in with a basic tendency in the history of Marxism that has taken many forms, all of which:

> have one thing in common, whether they like it or not and irrespective of their philosophical origins or political effects. . . . I refer to the tendency to view Marxism exclusively as a theory of society, as social philosophy, and hence to ignore or repudiate it as a theory of nature.[7]

On December 7, 1961, some six thousand young people gathered in a Paris auditorium to listen to a debate between four leading French scholars at the time: Roger Garaudy and Jean-Pierre Vigier, on the one side, versus Jean-Paul Sartre and Jean Hippolyte on the other. The subject: "is the dialectic solely a law of history or is it also a law of nature?"[8] Whether we formulate the question this way or whether the issue is presented as the question of dialectics simply as a *method* as opposed to dialectics as an objective process of reality conceptually reconstructed in our minds, the debate is in essence the same and so are the stakes.

Is Marxism to continue to serve as the independent world-outlook of the working class and its allies or is it to become vulnerable, through compromise and eclecticism, to the idealist conceptions of our political enemies?

This seems to me to be the practical relevance of the debate which we should never forget.

Is the Dialectics of Nature an "Engelsian Invention"?

Before looking at the actual philosophical questions involved—the question of continuity and change in the development of man from nature, the question of logic and theory in the natural sciences—there is a preliminary issue which deserves some consideration: the question of authorship.

Was the conception of a dialectics of nature simply the invention of a romantic Engels who unwisely "ventured where Marx had feared to tread",[9] or are we justified in arguing that *Marx himself* regarded a dialectical conception of nature as essential to a consistent revolutionary outlook?

The fact that it was Engels rather than Marx who dealt with philosophical questions in general and with the matter of a dialectical theory of nature in particular (the consequence incidentally of an agreed division of labour) has been seized upon to suggest that the dialectics of nature is really foreign to "the Marxism of Marx". In fact, there is a significant body of evidence to suggest that Marx himself was both stimulated by and in basic agreement with Engels's writing on this subject, and it is worth noting in particular in this regard Valentino Gerratana's well-researched essay on "Marx and Darwin". Gerratana draws extensively upon the Marx-Engels correspondence, Marx's treatment of the natural sciences in his early writings (and especially in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*), his general interest in the subject and his great enthusiasm for Darwin's "epoch-making" work, to support his conclusion that:

> (1) Engels acted as an important intellectual stimulus to Marx and (2) Marx attributed great value to the field which was systematically developed by Engels in *Anti-Dühring* and the *Dialectics of Nature*.[10]

Naturally the case for the dialectics of nature must stand or fall independently of Marx's personal judgment on its validity, but I shall try to

[4] *Capital* I (Lawrence & Wishart, 1970), p. 20.

[5] Cited in Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (Moscow/London, 1962), p. 165.

[6] Cited by P. Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism* (Collier, 1962), p. 147.

[7] "Preface to the New Edition" (1967) in *History and Class Consciousness* (Merlin, 1970), p. xvi.

[8] Jean-Pierre Vigier's contribution to the debate is reprinted in *Existentialism Versus Marxism*, ed. G. Novack (Delta, 1966), pp. 244-57.

[9] George Lichtheim, *Marxism* (London, 1964), p. 247.

[10] *New Left Review* 82, November/December 1973, p. 77. The question of authorship is dealt with in some detail in my *Marxism and the Theory of Praxis* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), pp. 47-56.

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show, drawing largely upon Marx's own writings and in terms of the logical requirements of a coherent Marxist outlook, why I believe that Marx did indeed attribute great value to a dialectical conception of the natural world.

Dialectics and the Problem of Dualism

Even before Marx had become a fully developed *dialectical* materialist and was still influenced by some of the abstract ideas of the Young Hegelians, he was concerned, above all, with working out a view of man and nature which transcends *dualism* —that abstract divide between "spirit" and "matter", "ideas" and "reality" which reflects in philosophical terms the antagonisms of a class-divided society.

It is worth focusing for a moment on the treatment of this problem in the Manuscripts of 1844, for what is significant here is that Marx defines "communism" not merely in social terms, but as a system which creates the basis for resolving philosophical problems as well. Communism, Marx tells us, is at once:

> the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man,[11]

and at the same time:

> the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species.

Despite the somewhat curious way in which Marx invites us to picture a war between philosophical categories, the real point he is making is both clear and profound: social strife reflects itself in philosophical *dualism* and communists must set themselves the task of combating this "strife" at every level. This is why, says Marx grandly:

> communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution.[12]

When Marx turns to evaluate Hegel's conception of the dialectic in the sections of the *Manuscripts* entitled (by later editors) the "Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole", the problem of dualism is at the root of his attack. For the essence of Hegel's difficulty, as Marx sees it, is that his dialectic is conceived ultimately as "abstractly mental labour", the movement of ideas, and hence cannot account historically for its own relationship to the world of matter. As a "non-objective being",[13] Hegel's dialectic is an absurdity, for it presumes the very creative activity it is supposed to *explain* and therefore, ironically, is a dialectical creator which cannot account for its own creation. Immaculately or mysteriously conceived, this dialectic is simply a mystical abstraction, and:

> the entire logic is the demonstration that abstract thought is nothing in itself; that the absolute idea is nothing for itself; that only *nature* is something.[14]

There is only one world—the world of matter or nature—and a dialectics of the mind can only make sense if it is also a dialectics of nature, for what other order of reality actually exists? If "only nature is something" and, as Lucretius observed many centuries before, "only nothing can come out of nothing", dialectics must be part of this "something"—a characteristic of the material world itself—or it cannot be anything at all. Only a "monist" or materialist conception of dialectics makes any real sense. This seems to me to be the standpoint from which Marx's further thought on the subject proceeds.

Man the Producer and the Material World

Although Marx sets himself the task of overcoming "the strife of opposites" in the Manuscripts of 1844, a dualism between man and nature continues to remain until the material *origins* of human activity in the world of nature can be adequately explained. Here mechanical materialism is no help, for what needs to be demonstrated is how and why human beings are active and "dialectical" in a way which qualitatively distinguishes them from other beings of nature. For there is little doubt, as *The German Ideology* itself is at pains to point out, that the dialectical quality of human activity is specifically rooted in the nature of man *the producer*—the conscious agent who has to change both himself and his environment in order to materially survive.

To assert this is one thing, but to prove it is another. If Marx is to rescue his own theory of dialectics from the mystifying subjectivism which afflicts the conception of Hegel, the creative nature of human activity (which Hegel had of course observed and reflected upon) cannot be dogmatically postulated: it must be scientifically explained, for what has become clear to Marx by 1845 is that man cannot create matter itself. As he puts it in *The Holy Family*, man:

[11] *Collected Works* 3 (Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), p. 296.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 297.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 337.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 343.

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> cannot even create any productive capacity if the matter does not exist beforehand.[15]

The question therefore arises: what relationship does dialectical creativity—the human capacity to produce—have to this world of matter which exists "beforehand"? In *The German Ideology* Marx puts it to Bruno Bauer: even if the sensuous world is reduced to a minimum, to a stick, this still presupposes "the action of producing the stick".[16] The same must also be true with what Marx calls "the first premise of all human history",[17] the existence of living human individuals who distinguish themselves from animals as material producers, for, like Bauer's stick, this too presupposes "the action of producing" this initial capacity for human production.

What is the dialectical process, in other words, which makes it possible for people to produce? It is true that at this stage Marx and Engels state that they feel unable to "go either into the actual physical nature of man, or into the natural conditions in which man finds himself",[18] but if we must wait for the publication of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* before a natural-historical foundation for the theory of class struggle can be adequately articulated, the *need* for such a foundation is already clearly stated. The writing of history, as Marx and Engels put it:

> must always set out from these natural bases and their modification in the course of history through the action of men.[19]

These natural bases must be rationally explained if we are to really understand how human history itself *begins,* for what is dogmatically assumed can just as easily be dogmatically denied. If the assertion of the productive nature of man is no more than a felicitous postulate which we happen to adopt, what do we say to bourgeois writers who see man not as producer but as a greedy consumer, driven animal-like by appetites which he cannot control? Who regard humans not as creators but as mere creatures of sin unable to really probe the mysterious ways of the universe?

Just as, in Marx's famous phrase, "it is essential to educate the educator", so likewise is it essential to explain the producer in terms of the production which brings him about. To assert that people are dialectical or can think dialectically is not enough: we must be able to account for the dialectical processes which produce these "dialectics" and this must mean *philosophically* evaluating the evolutionary process of nature to man.

Continuity and Change in the Dialectics of Evolution

Those who argue for a concept of dialectics which simply begins with man or is merely a method (origins unknown) which he uses to understand the world, are only able to perceive what *differentiates* man from nature. They are unable to see what unites them. It is no wonder that they have trouble in understanding the dialectics of nature, for the fact of the matter is that they are not thinking dialectically.

In order to understand what is *specific* or *unique* about the dialectical activity of men in society, it is essential that we understand human practice as part of the *wider* dialectical movement in the universe as a whole. The point was well put by Vigier, in the debate already referred to, when he argued that while the categories and laws of transformation of quantity into quality, interpenetration of opposites, the negation of the negation, the concept of totality, etc., have a *specific* meaning in the history of men, this does not mean therefore that they have no *general* relevance for understanding the world of nature. On the contrary, states Vigier, these categories attain:

> their full intelligibility and value only in the framework of the dialectic of nature[20]

and, after giving a numbers of concrete examples to illustrate his point, adds:

> it is true, as Sartre says, that the antagonism of historical forces is made up of elements distinct from the antagonisms of organic or physical-chemical forces. But that does not bother us at all precisely because we know that in each realm, or level, the terms of the contradiction that engenders the movement have specific properties[21]

and that surely is the point. The differences which clearly exist between one form of dialectical process and another does not exclude, but essentially presupposes and can only be made intelligible in terms of, their wider *identity.*

Marx himself underlines this point in a colourful way in *Capital* when he enthusiastically draws attention to what he calls Darwin's "history of

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15 "The Holy Family", *Collected Works* 4 (Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), p. 46.

16 *The German Ideology* (Moscow/London, 1964), p. 39.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

20 "Dialectics and Natural Science", in *Existentialism Versus Marxism, op. cit.*, p. 249.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 251.

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Nature's Technology"—"the formation of the organs of plants and animals, which organs serve as instruments of production for sustaining life".[22] Does this mean that because Marx, in this passage, is clearly referring to the dialectical character of natural evolution, to "instruments of production for sustaining life", he is somehow guilty of, in Richard Gunn's words, "a mystifying and animistic attribution of human characteristics to natural processes"?[23] This would only be true if Marx (throwing overboard everything he had said before) was now suggesting that the formation of the organs of plants and animals in nature is essentially similar to the conscious production of tools by men in society. No dialectical materialist would dispute that human activity is qualitatively different from the behaviour of plants and animals, but we slip into the position of "crude common sense" (as Marx once called it)[24] if we argue that change and continuity exclude one another, that where there is a distinction there can be no unity, and that because humans have developed productive capacities peculiar to themselves, they did not have to dialectically evolve from a dialectical nature in order to do so.

Men are distinct from nature, but although they are distinct from nature, they are also *part* of nature, for it is only through the evolution of nature that they acquire their distinct characteristics in the first place. Distinction, in other words, does not exclude unity, it presupposes it. Indeed, it is only through the broader framework of the dialectics of nature that the dramatic birth of man the producer can be rationally explained, for unless nature is *itself* dialectical, how could it produce a *dialectical man*?

To contend, therefore, that dialectics can never be more than "an affair of the mind" or, as Alfred Schmidt put it:

> it is only the process of knowing nature which can be dialectical, not nature itself[25]

is to leave the real origins of dialectics in its distinctively human form, shrouded in mystery. It is to uncritically perpetuate the very dualism between man and nature, spirit and matter which ruling-class philosophers have always accepted, and which Marxists have always fought to overcome.

Does Nature Go Round in Circles, "Repeating the Same Thing"

If we reject the dialectical view of nature which Darwin did so much to establish and which furnishes the natural-historical foundation of the Marxist outlook, what do we put in its place? It is true that Sartre has on occasion argued that everyone is free to "believe" or not to believe in the dialectical nature of material processes,[26] but just how difficult it is to sustain this agnostic aloofness in practice can be seen from the fact that we soon find Sartre debating with Vigier and Garaudy on the very issue!

It seems to me inevitable that if we reject a dialectical view of nature, we will, like it or not, revert in a curiously anachronistic manner to *pre*-Darwinian conceptions of nature which conceived the different species and varieties of the material world as being unrelated and isolated particulars without any evolutionary movement in common. Indeed, this mechanistic and metaphysical view of nature is sometimes *explicitly* endorsed by those rejecting a universal concept of dialectics. Alfred Schmidt, for example, argues that nature only becomes dialectical when it is drawn into "the web of human and social purposes"[27] and that:

> before the existence of human societies, nature could only achieve polarities and oppositions of moments external to each other;[28]

Lukacs likewise in *History and Class Consciousness* endorsed Hegel's theological view of nature as a chaotic set of forces which go round in a circle "repeating the same thing".[29]

This position not only reveals an astonishingly cavalier disregard for the great scientific advances in the 19th (let alone the 20th) century, but it aggravates all the problems already noted of trying to explain the origin of dialectics as a method or social activity without accepting the dialectical character of the universe. For if the world of nature before man is conceived of simply as a static machine, a chaotic interaction of self-contained "billiard balls", a world without inner-development or change, how can we explain the

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[22] *Capital* I, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

[23] *Comment*, November 13, 1975, p. 383.

[24] "It is characteristic of the entire crudeness of 'common sense' . . . that where it succeeds in seeing a distinction it fails to see a unity, and where it sees a unity it fails to see a distinction", cited by Schmidt in *The Concepts of Nature in Marx* (New Left Books, 1971), p. 50.

[25] Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

[26] See Jeff Coulter's reference to this in "Marxism and the Engels Paradox", *Socialist Register*, 1971 (Merlin Press), p. 143.

[27] *The Concept of Nature in Marx, op. cit.*, p. 58-9.

[28] Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

[29] Cited by Schmidt, *ibid.*, p. 210.

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emergence of a *dialectical* man out of this void of bleak mechanistic timelessness?

The inference is clear: human order simply emerges out of natural chaos in some kind of miraculous fashion ("In the beginning was the *Word*") which defies reason and science. And this is the assumption necessarily embraced, implicitly or explicitly by those who denounce the dialectics of nature for its "animism" and "teleology"!

Philosophical Categories and the Retreat to Empiricism

Despite the fact that a consistent theory of dialectics is impossible unless we explain how the *idea* of dialectics can only arise as a reflection of the *reality* of a dialectical universe, the concept is frequently criticised for being "metaphysical", "abstract", "a scholastic straitjacket", and so on.

What is the reason for these attacks?

Engels frequently stressed the point that "nature is the proof of dialectics":[30] the laws and categories of dialectics cannot be foist upon the history of nature and society, but can only be *abstracted* from them.[31] Marx confirmed this when he described dialectics as being scandalous to the bourgeoisie because in its rational form it lets nothing impose upon it and is in essence critical and revolutionary.[32] The idea of dialectics is, after all, as he puts it in an earlier passage:

> nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind and translated into forms of thought.[33]

Yet when Engels sets out to abstract dialectical categories from a dialectical world, he is accused of confounding his reader with "abstract metaphysical theses" which somehow or other "stand over against reality".[34] Alfred Schmidt appears to believe that since "matter only exists in particular forms of being",[35] it is thereby impermissible to make statements about matter *in general*. It is, of course, true that the laws of dialectics and the categories through which these laws are elaborated and expressed, are highly general, for until someone discovers a form of motion which is undialectical, they can be said to apply to all phenomena without exception.

But why call these dialectical principles "metaphysical" simply because they are formulated in universal terms?

After all, when Schmidt refers to the fact that "matter only exists in particular forms of being", what is "matter" if it is not a general philosophical category referring to "that which exists independently from consciousness and which is known to us through the senses"?[36] Matter, of course, is not *simply* a general category; it is a general category with a *particular* philosophical meaning, used to refer to particular aspects which things have *in common*. Indeed, although it is true to say that categories like quantity and quality, negation of the negation, motion, unity of opposites, etc., are the *most* general philosophical categories with which science operates, in fact all understanding even at the most elementary level of the individual word involves some level of abstraction or generality.

Schmidt's own assertions about the material world as something "pre-dialectical" or mechanistic are no less generalised than the dialectical principles which he rejects: what makes them "metaphysical", to use Schmidt's own word, is that they cannot be reconciled with the dialectical discoveries of modern science.

"The empiricist", Engels has written, "becomes so steeped in the habit of empirical experience that he believes that he is still in the field of sensuous experience when he is operating with abstractions",[37] and it is this inability to understand the necessary use of general philosophical categories in all scientific work which also accounts for criticisms of the dialectics of nature as a concept which is "animistic" or "teleological". For although "contradiction", "negation" and "motion", for example, apply *generally* to material processes, this does not mean that all contradictions are therefore "the same": the contradictions within one society differ from those of another, just as the contradictions in society in general differ qualitatively from those in the natural world. It is no more "teleological" to say that there is contradiction in nature than it is to say there is "motion" or "change" in nature, for concepts like "contradiction", "motion", "change" are *general* concepts which help us to explain and relate the particular features of an infinite number of *qualitatively distinct* entities.

The general does not exclude the particular, as the empiricist thinks: on the contrary, it helps us identify and explain it. It is hardly teleological or "animistic" to refer to the "eruption" of an earth-

[30] *Anti-Dühring, op. cit.*, p. 36.
[31] *Dialectics of Nature, op. cit.*, p. 63.
[32] *Capital* I, p. 20.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[34] Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism* (Pelican, 1971), p. 120.
[35] *The Concept of Nature in Marx, op. cit.*, p. 57.

[36] I am indebted here to Dave Pavett's valuable paper on "Science and Ideology", also presented to the Science and Ideology course at CUL 8, and to his lucid exposition on the importance of philosophical categories in science from the floor of the debate.
[37] *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 239.

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quake simply because societies "erupt" as well! The concepts we use are general only because they abstract the common features from particular things which are, in all other respects, quite different. This is what empiricist critiques of the dialectics of nature, still bedevilled by the "crudeness of common sense", basically forget. They either see distinction or they see unity: what they fail to see is *both*.

The Dangers of Dogmatism

Is there not, however, the danger of dogmatism in a conception of dialectics which applies both to nature and to society?

There is indeed a danger of dogmatism in applying the Marxist theory of dialectics, but only because there is a danger of dogmatism whenever we use general categories in trying to understand the world. As Lenin has pointed out:

> we cannot imagine, express, measure, depict movement without interrupting continuity, without simplifying, coarsening, dismembering, strangling that which is living.[38]

But if all generalisation contains within it the danger of dogmatism, dogmatism and generalisation are nevertheless two different things. Dogmatism involves a disregard for the complexities of the real world in a way which prevents us from understanding what is really going on; generalisation, on the other hand, when employed scientifically and in a materialist fashion, enables us to classify, interrelate and explain, so that we have a clear idea of things as they are.

Engels himself commented that "forced and often outrageous treatment" arises when the laws of dialectics are "foisted on nature and history as laws of thought" and not, as he stressed, "*deduced*" from them".[39] The dialectics of nature, understood as scientific categories in philosophy which reflect objective reality, are therefore the less vulnerable to dogmatism the more they are concretely related to the material world. It is, on the contrary, those who speak of dialectics *purely* as forms of thought who run the greatest risk of dogmatism, for they deny any intelligible connection between the categories we use and the dialectical processes of material reality. Indeed, if we do not consciously deduce dialectical concepts from a dialectical reality, how can we prevent ourselves from employing dialectical categories, mysteriously generated by the inner workings of the mind, in an idealist and dogmatist manner?

To combat dogmatism in applying the principles of dialectics, we need to remember (i) that the categories of dialectics can only be rationally expounded as theoretical reflections of material reality, and (ii) that the general laws and categories of dialectics should never be used as a substitute for "a concrete study of concrete conditions".

A universal theory of dialectics is a *guide* to scientific work, and since all scientists, including the scientists of nature, are guided by some kind of philosophy, it surely makes sense that they should be guided by a philosophy which has been confirmed by and increasingly draws upon the latest developments in technology and science. Who can doubt that every scientific development since the time of Lenin, relativity, quantum theory, cybernetics, micro-biology, radio-astronomy, mathematical logic, all underline the absurdity of a static and mechanistic view of the world around us and demonstrate how essential it is to understand nature in dialectical terms?

Sam Lilley demonstrated the importance of the dialectical conception of nature to practising natural scientists some years ago when he pointed to the assistance dialectical materialism can give in rescuing physics from its contemporary plight.

Once we understand the dialectical truth that the most fundamental dimension of reality is change, Lilley argued, then on this view, an electron

> is not a permanent "object" that can enter into various combinations. An electron is only an unusually stable balance among various underlying changes. A sigma-plus particle is a much less stable balance of some other set of changes. . . . But *just what* balance of *just what* underlying changes? Ay, there's the rub. Philosophy—dialectical materialism or any other—does not answer that sort of question. It only stimulates us to ask. And then the hard work starts. . . .[40]

[38] *Collected Works* 38 (Moscow/London, 1961), p. 259.

[39] *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 63.

[40] "Marxism and Science", *Marxism Today*, November 1969, p. 350.

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The dialectical concept of nature does not stand in the path of practical scientific research but helps to make that research as effective as possible, freeing the scientist from idealist prejudices and mechanical ways of thinking which can only hinder his work.

Any theory can be dogmatically misapplied and the dialectics of nature is no exception. But just as the theory of class struggle is not invalidated simply because it is often crudely or mechanically used, so the dogmatic misapplication of the dialectics of nature is the fault of those who so abuse it. It cannot be blamed on the concept itself.

Indeed, dialectics itself, in its rational materialist form, is the great solvent of all dogmatic attitudes, for dogmatism arises when we uncritically inherit the philosophical traditions of the past and fail to question them, when we adopt methods of approach whose relationship to the real world we cannot explain, and when we adopt a concept of dialectics whose material origins lie shrouded in mystery. It is the continuing influence of these mechanistic and dualistic fetters from the past which prevent us from understanding dialectics rationally and applying its principles in a concrete and creative fashion.

In 1844 Marx presented the world with an astonishing prediction:

> natural science will in time incorporate into itself the science of man, just as the science of man will incorporate into itself natural science: there will be *one* science.[41]

Dialectics as the product of the great scientific and political revolutions of our time can alone provide the theoretical framework and philosophical categories for the unification of science, but this is only possible when dialectical principles are fully and consistently worked out.

Dialectics, however, cannot be fully and consistently worked out as an integral part of Marxist philosophy if we compromise with the kind of dualistic thinking which denies what Marx called "the natural scientific basis for the class struggle in history". Unless we allow dialectics its necessary basis in the world of nature, we erect the framework of Marxist theory upon a conceptual quicksand so that dialectics even becomes powerless to explain the dialectical creation of its own creator.

(The reply of Richard Gunn to John Hoffman—the second part of the Debate—will be printed in the February issue of Marxism Today.)

[41] *Collected Works* 3, p. 304.

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Review Articles:

New Directions in "English" Studies

Michael Cohen

(The author is Lecturer in English at the University of Salford)

A significant contribution to the debate about the content and purpose of English studies has appeared with the publication of *Experiments in English Teaching*, edited by David Craig and Margot Heinemann (Edward Arnold, 1976). Though this is a collection of essays by a good many writers, there is a unifying theme: the rejection of the most hidebound traditions of "Eng. Lit.", and English teaching more generally, and the (often excited) discovery of new methods and directions.

Critiques of "Eng. Lit."—especially as taught in the universities—are nothing new, of course. A few years ago we had Joe Spriggs's chapter in *Counter Course* (Penguin, 1972). I thought that this was much too crude an analysis, but it did make some valid points which anticipated the present volume. There was also a sharply polemical book by (of all people) Stephen Potter called *The Muse In Chains* which was written as far back as the 1930s. It was essentially negative, but the theme of a teaching of literature which had somehow lost its way and actually put "the Muse in chains" links directly with the Craig-Heinemann collection, with its recurring emphasis on the need to break the bonds which have constricted "English" as a subject and hence the development of both those on the receiving end of the teaching and of those who do the teaching.

I was struck by Nigel Gray's remark in his chapter on creative writing classes that, in his experience, "the least creative writers always seem to be retired grammar school teachers . . . what has happened to their creativity?" (169). We can't generalise too confidently about the deadening effect of grammar school English when we remember that Gwyn Thomas, for example, was a long-serving and dedicated grammar school English teacher. But I can't help feeling that Thomas and others whose creative talents have emerged intact from the round of essay, summary, comprehension, clause analysis and set books, have sometimes survived *in spite of* this conditioning. It's salutary to know that David Storey, that interesting contemporary novelist and playwright, got seventeen [17] per cent in his A Level English paper, according to a recent interview in the *Observer*. I must have taken mine in roughly the same year and I got about 85. Now I *teach* English Literature and Mr. Storey *writes* it.

Of course, there are questions of disparity of talent here. But one of the messages of this book is that everyone has *some* creative talent, that it is an essential part of English Studies to foster this, and that to do so we have to look hard at those aspects of traditional teaching which may be positively inimical to the production of individual original work. Lucky the Lancaster students therefore who can add to their more conventional studies David Craig's "free ninth unit" with its core of personal creative work, but equally lucky those College of Education or College of Art students who have been encouraged in this way well before David Craig's experiments. Another message of the book is that universities have usually lagged behind other establishments of education in new approaches to "English", new approaches, incidentally, which cannot be blamed for the alleged "falling standards" of literacy that, in spite of the Bullock report, we are currently being told about, and which do not conflict with the pursuit of "excellence" in education.

The Conception of "English"

Like the editors, I find myself putting "English" in inverted commas, partly to indicate the unsatisfactory conception of the subject which has often prevailed, and partly to show that its boundaries are now uncertain as it expands in different directions, either to link up with other disciplines, or to develop potentialities which were always present in the study of language and literature but which the reduction of literature to the consideration of "texts" alone or of language to that of the pro-

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prieties of "Standard English" alone has, until recently, often left underdeveloped. Marxists, of course, have always argued that literature must be related to history and society, though only the best Marxist criticism has been able to demonstrate the subtlety and complexity of the relationship.

Peter Widdowson's chapter on the BA in Humanities scheme at Thames Polytechnic is an interesting account of one method of rescuing literature from the isolated study of the text, which is all the more persuasive because the course does *not* reduce literature to the status of social or historical "evidence" alone but also reminds students that literary works are "complete imaginative artefacts, bounded by a particular formal logic" (127). I am glad to see Peter Widdowson conceding that there is nothing inherently superior about the interdisciplinary as opposed to the specialist course and that interdisciplinary methods have their problems, even when they succeed in broadening the students' horizons.

Liberation of the Isolated "Text"

Another approach to the liberation of the isolated "text" is, where possible, to "return the work to the medium for which the artist had framed it", often an important step in the "de-mystifying" of the written word. This is naturally especially relevant in the study of drama where the theatrical context is sometimes completely neglected. I myself still believe that "dramatic literature" is a valid discipline, but heartily agree that even in a non-theatre course the students must be encouraged at least to read through or walk through scenes from the dramas being studied. Moreover just as plays have to be got "off the page", so have poems, which should be read aloud, or, in the case of lyric or ballad verse, heard with their music. Nevertheless, for every reader who has confined his students to "the words on the page", there must be one waiting to write in and say that he has been getting them "off the page" for 30 years.

A question which runs through the whole collection is the crucial one of methods and the connected issue of teacher-student relationships.

"Cultural Conquest"

An essay on adult education by Bill Parkinson suggests that what has often been offered to the working class as education has amounted to an attempt at "cultural conquest" (154). The issue of a "class content" in education is a complex one and it has sometimes been more obscured than clarified by the blanket labelling of the present system as "bourgeois" and the over-simple identification of the teaching of, say, "Standard English", as a form of indoctrination. And yet much as I approve of, for example, David Craig's experiment in getting a girl student to write an essay in her native Durham English, I don't think that it is necessarily a form of "cultural conquest" to educate the working class *primarily* in the principles of "Standard English". Like it or not, this is the dialect of English in which the student has to be competent in society as it is. It is the dialect in which newspapers and books get written, not least the book under review. But what earns unqualified approval is Bill Parkinson's insistence on starting from and having respect for working-class culture, its street literature, songs, oral tales and other traditions, *including* its varying local vernaculars. I found his account of methods and syllabuses used at Keele in adult education courses one of the most interesting sections.

The Teaching Process

The desire to counteract what Arnold Kettle and Graham Martin describe as the possible "authoritarian implications of all teaching" (25) lies behind the Keele methods and others which are recounted. David Craig attempts to "reverse the teacher-taught current" by asking students to draw on experience which they have had but which he hasn't; Professor Broadbent at East Anglia experiments with "non-directive" seminars, in which he insists in sitting in the non-authoritarian position of a member of a circle, and asks students what they want to do: "Here it changed from me-them to us" (33). But neither Professor Broadbent, nor others like Peter Widdowson who discuss the relative merits of lectures and seminars, want to "junk" the set lecture. This still has an essential part to play as "a geography of the primary material" or as a demonstration of the methodical thinking through of a problem (136).

The teaching process *cannot* always be an exactly equal relationship between staff and students, between "the older and better-paid: the staff" and "the younger and more or less unpaid: the students", as a rather unsatisfactory sentence puts it in the editors' introduction (1). The staff, for all their limitations, do have something to teach, and do have qualifications, degrees, higher degrees, publications, teaching experience, which certainly must not be regarded uncritically but which also cannot be waved aside. The current must flow more from the teacher to the taught than the reverse for quite a lot of the time, but equally if it doesn't reverse itself increasingly as the course goes on, then something is wrong with the course. The essential thing is that the *spirit* of the lecture, like that of the "non-directive" methods, should be one of *"with* not *for"* the students.

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Group Projects

Course work and assessment are part of the methods problem. There are interesting accounts of often radical alternatives to the straightforward essay such as Craig's and many teacher training establishments' use of scrapbook, film, tape collection, photograph collection, or imaginative writing projects, or Professor Broadbent's "worksheets" which I feel owe something to the Open University's pioneering assignment methods which Arnold Kettle and Graham Martin analyse in the most open-minded and uncomplacent of ways. A point which I feel ought to be stressed more in the discussion of student work tasks is the importance of the *group* project.

In the world outside the educational system most problems are solved and issues debated in groups, but most students pass through secondary and higher education without being called upon to do *any* collective work: on the contrary, during all those years on the examination obstacle course collaboration is a deadly sin. It becomes clear how fortunate and exceptional those students are who have worked with Albert Hunt at Bradford, or on the projects designed by Vera Gottlieb and Nesta Jones at Goldsmiths, to have had this experience of creative co-operation. Theatre, of course, lends itself to this particularly easily, but there must be ways of introducing group projects into almost every aspect of English studies—for example, the group assignment to study local speech characteristics.

Assessment is a perennial debating point. I myself would not go as far as David Craig, who describes it as a "humiliating and deforming business" (9), though I think that it can be done in a humiliating and deforming way. I think that assessment will always be necessary and that students actually *want* it provided they feel that the work they have been asked to do is worthwhile and that the criteria are clear and sensible. What remains true is that some of the attitudes behind some kinds of grading and categorising can be appalling, in particular the attitude which regards a student's degree class as a precise and permanent assessment of ability: all that talk about "the first-class mind" and "the second-class mind" which I heard Professor Muriel Bradbrook indulging in on the radio recently. I wonder what she makes of David Storey's seventeen per cent at A Level, or, for that matter, Walter Benjamin's failed Ph.D.?

Losing Sight of the "Core"

All in all, this is a most stimulating and potentially liberating book for all concerned with the teaching of "English". If I have a reservation, it is about those contributions to it which, in an understandable reaction against what is now hidebound, seem in danger of losing sight of any "core" for the subject, which must be the *specialised* study of the English language in action in both literary and non-literary contexts. This is a very wide field, but I don't think it includes "all the media of creative expression" (music? the dance?) as the editors suggest at one point (5), and whilst I agree with them that "English" is well fitted to "link up in an interdisciplinary way with nearly all other 'subjects' into which our arts faculties at present tend to insulate themselves" (5), I also believe that there are limits to the value of interdisciplinary work, and that there are, in fact, such things as "subjects", and that "English" is, in fact, a subject. I do not say this lightly, having just emerged from the salt mines of a part-time Ph.D. which was both "interdisciplinary" and "comparative" (literature/history, German drama/English drama). It succeeded in the end but a point which had to become painfully clear before it could is that an enthusiasm for interdisciplinary work does not dispose of the fact that there *are* discrete disciplines, and that in an interdisciplinary project one of these disciplines finally has to *dominate* if it is to hold together: a point implicitly recognised in the Thames Polytechnic degree scheme which has an interdisciplinary Part One and a specialist Part Two. There is a great deal to be said for linking English up with "Communication Studies" or "Cultural Studies", but in the end those are *new* disciplines and "English" has disappeared, which is a pity because I believe that there is life in the old dog yet, especially if we can get her to take some of the medicine prescribed in this very concerned and helpful book.

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F. R. Leavis and "The Living Principle"

Michelene Wandor

F. R. Leavis has been an influential figure in the teaching of English in this country. His work has centred almost entirely round Cambridge University, where he himself studied in the twenties. There he met and married Q. D. Leavis, and the two of them became the focus of production of a literary periodical called *Scrutiny*, which was published from 1932-53. F. R. Leavis is now 80, and this latest book of his was published last September.[1]

It is a curiously difficult book to review on its own terms. Despite its challenging title, which might suggest further exposition of the ideas the Leavis's promulgated in the thirties, it is neither a full restatement of those principles, nor a departure from them.

Preceding some short chapters which first appeared in the pages of *Scrutiny*, and the lengthy analysis of T. S. Eliot's poem "Four Quartets" which ends the book, is a general introduction which contains a somewhat weary restatement of the most general principles which spurred *Scrutiny* and the group associated with it in its crusading fire in the thirties. It was in its way a passionate response to a decade of economic and political turmoil, which affected intellectual and cultural workers in some cases as much as it did industrial workers. Alongside the severe crisis in employment in some areas developed the new media industries —radio, cinema, gramophone, and in the middle thirties serious mass paperback publishing through the founding of Penguin and Pelican books.

"Mass" versus "Minority" Culture

At the same time stasis in some areas and cutbacks in other areas of education lent a greater tension to the cultural and ideological debates of the period which were formulated around the question of the relative values of "mass" versus "minority" culture. This debate was broadly polarised into two groupings—the "minority" culture group as represented through *Scrutiny* and the "mass" culture group as represented on the literary front by a periodical called *Left Review*. The latter was associated with the Communist Party, and was the focus for the struggle to assimilate and make active use of historical materialism for the study and understanding and production of literature; it sought also to politicise writers themselves, and in a more minor way to begin to analyse the social relations of literary production.

A Trans-historical Community

One of the most striking characteristics of the *Scrutiny* group was its claim to be non-political—indeed, to posit those humane values it claimed to find in great literature, in opposition to the "political". In some respects this was a surface liberalism which concealed the real conservative basis of the *Scrutiny* ideology, but to which we can find clues in the continual presence of the spectre of Marxism in almost every issue of *Scrutiny* throughout the thirties. They recognised Marxism as an opposition, but never clearly defined it and never allowed it to put its own case. The Scrutineers argued as fiercely with their invisible Marxists as they did with the cultural crisis they saw as a simple product of technological development. The parameters of the *Scrutiny* ideology are complex: *The Living Principle* merely encapsulates them:

> "The 'living principle' itself is an apprehended totality of what, as registered in the language, has been won or established in immemorial human living. . . . We call a writer major when we judge that his wisdom, more deeply and robustly rooted, represents a more securely poised resultant, one more fully comprehensive and humanly better centred—considerations bearing crucially on future growth—than any ordinarily brilliant person could offer us. . . ."

Behind this formulation hovers Matthew Arnold's notion of the "cultural heritage", "the best that has been known and thought" as contained in the great literature of the dominant class. The great writers form a trans-historical community, in which moral judgments are carried across centuries from the writer, via the text, to the reader.

What the *Scrutiny* group deplored were the

[1] F. R. Leavis, *The Living Principle: 'English' as a Discipline of Thought*, Chatto & Windus, £4.

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obstacles which had arisen to this communicative process of "authority"—and their view of cultural history, changes in the form and content of literary production, is spelled out in Q. D. Leavis's book *Fiction and the Reading Public*, which was written before *Scrutiny* itself appeared. In this book the halting beginnings of a sociological approach to changes in literary quality and taste are manipulated to prove the point that the combination of technological advances in printing, the spread of literacy through the Education Act of 1870, and the establishment of publishing as a trade, have produced a corrupt cultural scene in which there is a desperate urgency for a discriminating "minority" to guide the ruling class back into the kind of elegant moral stances they are presumed to have held during the 17th-18th centuries, when literary production (such as it was) was based upon a living conversational language, and a literary language derived from the Authorised Version of the Bible.

No Theory of History

Ironically, despite the protests to the contrary, it was an ideology which pointed backwards; there is absolutely no theory of history in the *Scrutiny* ideology, apart from the history of literature itself. The social élitism, in which F. R. Leavis posited a trained élite at a university (Cambridge) who would re-establish standards of criticism, finds its mirror in an élite of discourses in which the study of English literature takes a position of leadership above all academic disciplines. There are notions of cultural imperialism implicit in this, and *The Living Principle*'s preface brings them out for us. When he is speaking of the "English" language, F. R. Leavis tells us, it is not American or any other kind, but the correct kind of British English. The conservative model is complete and over-riding.

However, the urgent need for a full reappraisal of the work of F. R. Leavis and the *Scrutiny* group has not appeared out of the blue. Many articles, theses and books are currently covering the field and will no doubt be published in the next few years. This new critical approach is thrown up by the fact that the Leavises had very real and important historical impact through their dogged and single-minded persistence in asserting that the study of literature, and modern literature in particular, were matters of serious academic and ideological attention. They helped push forward the movement away from philological-grammatical study of texts to the literary critical approach, and much of their textual work raised questions and provided suggested enlightenment on textual interpretation and aesthetic effect. Similarly, their general concern about the impact of the new media on literature was one shared by many Marxists, and in particular much of the early attention Leavis paid to the use of language in advertising has been followed through by people such as Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams.

But F. R. Leavis could never accept the implications either of mass education or the mass production and distribution of artistic products, and this is one of the reasons why he has never developed any of his ideas beyond those formed in the early thirties; it is the reason why for him D. H. Lawrence remains our last great novelist, and why T. S. Eliot, who is given such careful attention in this latest book, is seen as our last great poet. This book is interesting as a coda to the work done by an influential modern figure, but only of marginal interest (the final section on Eliot) to any Marxist interested in literature.

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Discussion Contributions on:

Theories of Inflation

James Harvey

The discussion about inflation in *Marxism Today*, which began with John Purton's two articles in December 1973 and January 1974 has been spread over such a long period, with wide intervals between contributions, that it must be difficult for anyone to form a clear picture of the issues at stake. Yet this is probably the most important theoretical problem confronting the labour movement at the present time. For if the Communist Party and the left wing adopt a wrong theory about inflation, the policy based on it will be wrong and if so, this will affect the whole alternative programme of the left by depriving it of credibility; for inflation is such a central issue that failure to propose a convincing solution for it will fatally undermine the position of the left. It may therefore be useful to look back and try to sum up and classify the various theories and views which are held on this subject, including those which have been put forward in *Marxism Today*, and to examine their implications for policy and ideology.

I must explain at the outset that I support the theory set out by Pat Devine (March 1974) and supported by Mike Prior (April 1975) and which I propose to call the "conflict theory". It is possible to distinguish among British Marxists six main approaches towards inflation:

1. The conflict theory.
2. State expenditure theories.
3. The monetarist theory.
4. The empirical approach.
5. The monopoly theory.
6. Fundamentalist theories.

The Conflict Theory

This theory is based on the profound change in class relationships which took place during and after the war. Before the war, money wages were held down by mass unemployment which created a surplus of labour in Britain and in most capitalist countries. The prolonged period of relatively full employment during and after the war resulted in a massive shift in the balance of power in the labour market. Employers were no longer able to prevent the trade unions from gaining money wage increases greater than productivity increases.

But equally the trade unions were unable to prevent employers from increasing prices to protect their profit margins, a process which was facilitated by the existence of monopolistic conditions in most sectors of industry. Thus inflation emerged after the war as the principal means for employers to defend their profits against demands for money wage increases in excess of productivity increases. The effect of this qualitative change in the balance of power in the labour market was to replace periodic depression and mass unemployment by chronic inflation as the major economic problem facing postwar capitalism.

The fundamental cause of inflation, then, is the struggle between capital and labour for a greater share of the available resources. But, in addition, two other forms of conflict have intervened. First, the state has been taking an increasing share of national resources as a result of popular pressure for better social services, the growing dependence of private enterprise on public subsidies, and the maintenance of arms spending at a high level. Second, the terms of trade have recently moved against Britain and the other imperialist powers as a delayed effect of decolonisation interacting with the growing inter-imperialist rivalry and competition between capitalism and socialism on a world scale; the rise in oil prices is the major example of this shift in the terms of trade.

The outcome of these conflicts over the use of resources is the result of the interaction of monetary variables in terms of which the struggle is fought out —money wages, prices, taxes, state borrowing, and import prices. Continuous inflation is the result of a situation in which available resources are insufficient to meet all the claims on them and the various claimants cannot be prevented from bidding. Inflation is the result of the unplanned, anarchic character of the capitalist system given the prevailing balance of power with respect to each of the major contradictions in the contemporary world.

State Expenditure Theories

If the state finances an increase in its expenditure by printing money, or by borrowing from the banks which will result in an increase in the total of bank deposits and has the same effect as printing money, there will then be an inflation. The most famous runaway inflations, such as the German one in 1923, were the result of an ever-growing budget deficit

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financed by the printing of money. Nowadays it is often suggested (by Tories mainly) that inflation in Britain has been caused by excessive public spending on social services or (by the left) by excessive public spending on arms. For example, the Communist Party Manifesto for the October 1974 general election said that the arms programme "is one of the main factors in inflation." But so long as any increase in state expenditure is financed by an increase in taxation or by borrowing from the public (as distinct from the banks) there can be no "printing of money" inflationary effect, because the purchasing power of the public is reduced to the same extent as the increase in state spending. An examination of the post-war finances of Britain and the main capitalist economies shows, moreover, that the very substantial growth in state expenditure which has taken place has been financed mainly by tax increases, supplemented by borrowing from the public.[1]

The growth in state expenditure has contributed to inflation in a quite different way, namely, through the increased pressure on resources which it has exerted, especially since the late 1960s. This effect is incorporated into the conflict theory as briefly set out above.[2]

Monetarism

The principal rival theory put forward in the discussion in *Marxism Today* has been monetarism. Monetarists hold that inflation is a monetary phenomenon arising from an excess demand for goods and services, which is the result of an excessive expansion in the supply of money, that is, expansion at a higher rate than the rate of growth of real output. The greater part of Ron Bellamy's article (November 1974) was devoted to a criticism of Pat Devine's conflict theory, but when he advanced his own view of the cause of inflation he adopted the monetarist position, with the statement that "creation of credit in sufficient volume is a necessary and *sufficient* condition for rises in the price level" (p. 343, my italics, JH). John Purton's analysis covered a very wide field but it seems to me that while his first article (December 1973) was mainly fundamentalist (see below) his second article (January 1974) can fairly be classified as essentially monetarist, with its stress on the over-expansion of credit as the cause of inflation.

Thus he refers to the "tendency for the modern credit system to break all bounds represented by the underlying productivity and value relations" (p. 24) and, after giving figures of the growth of the money supply since 1965, says that "such rates of growth cannot but be inflationary" (p. 28). The contribution by Larry Finlay (May 1974) also sees the cause of inflation as the injection of credit by the state and by finance capital (p. 153).

The most systematic exposition of the monetarist case was by David Cobham (July 1974) though his article did not attempt any explanation of the rise in prices between 1945 and the late 1960s. His thesis was that the acceleration of inflation from the late 1960s was closely related to the crisis in the international monetary system resulting from an intensification of inter-imperialist rivalry. His argument is hard to summarise briefly, but I think it is fair to say that he sees the acceleration of inflation as originating from monetary expansion in the US to finance the Vietnam war, and then being transmitted and maintained in the other advanced capitalist countries by the expansion of the international money supply brought about by the growth of euro-markets. Bellamy approves of Cobham's explanation (p. 148) and Purton also holds that the outward flow of dollars from the US led to an expansion of credit in other capitalist countries (p. 24).

The monetarist theory can be roughly summed up by saying that the inflation in advanced capitalist countries has been caused by excessive growth of the domestic money supply and aggravated by the growth of the international money supply. This theory has a good deal of support in the labour movement. Thus Alan Brown in the *Labour Monthly*, August 1975, says that "the heart-beat of inflation is the sound of the government printing presses, creating money to meet demands from within the economy for greater liquidity." And the Communist Party pamphlet written by Bert Ramelson entitled *Heath's war on your wage packet* (February 1973, p. 8) quoted with approval from an article by Professor Laidler putting forward the same view as David Cobham, that the acceleration of inflation was due to the way in which the US war in Vietnam was financed. Professor Laidler is a leading monetarist economist.

Monetarists claim support for their theory by

[1] The relevant statistics have been collected by OECD and are usefully set out by Ian Gough in "State Expenditure and Capital", *New Left Review 92*, pp. 58-60. He also examines the more elaborate form of state expenditure theory of inflation put forward by David Yaffé in *NLR 80* and elsewhere and shows it to be no more valid than the simple form.

[2] It is true that the central government's "borrowing requirement"—the best measure of the budget deficit—grew very sharply in 1974-75 from £2.4 billion to £5.1 billion. But this was the *product* (not the cause) of the unprecedented inflation combined with recession which raised public spending much faster than the increase in tax revenue. In practice the deficit was financed by borrowing from the public at home supplemented by borrowing abroad, thus avoiding any "printing of money" effect. If the even larger deficit expected for 1975-76 cannot be financed in the same way, so that the state has to resort to borrowing from the banks, then of course there could be a "printing of money" effect.

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showing that in any country there is generally a fairly close correlation between the rate of increase in the quantity of money and in the level of prices. They argue that the amount of money people wish to hold is a stable function of the level of real income and certain other factors; if they find themselves with more money than they wish to hold they will get rid of the excess by spending or lending it, and therefore, if this increase in the quantity of money is greater than the growth of output, there must inevitably be a rise in prices (Cobham, July 1974, p. 207). However, the crucial question is, how does the increased quantity of money find its way into the hands of the public?

One way in which this can happen is when the state prints money to finance an increase in public expenditure, as discussed in the previous section on state expenditure theories of inflation. In this case there is no dispute about the chain of events leading to inflation, only a different way of interpreting them. The monetarists say that the cause of the rise in prices is the increase in the quantity of money, whereas the supporters of the conflict theory say that the initiating cause is the social pressures which have led to the increase in state expenditure while the expansion in the money supply is only the mechanism through which these pressures have operated.

Similarly, in the case of price rises caused by the conflict between labour and capital for higher wages and profits, the monetarists argue that prices can only rise because the state, through its control of the banking system, allows the necessary expansion in the money supply to take place; the banking system, so to speak, ratifies the rising level of prices. Monetarists therefore claim in general that whatever the initiating cause of more money getting into the hands of the public, the rise in prices could have been prevented if the state had refused to permit the money supply to increase.

Their remedy for inflation is simple: it can be prevented so long as the state restricts the growth of the money supply to the growth of output. At a time of high inflation this policy will cause massive unemployment, for employers will not be able to raise prices to offset increases in wages or material costs, and there will be widespread bankruptcies; but it is the only cure for inflation. This is the position of bourgeois monetarists; that of Marxist monetarists is discussed below.

The Empirical Approach

When prices are rising it is always possible to point to some factor which has recently given a push to prices. For example, there was the tremendous rise in world commodity prices and especially in oil prices in 1973, which raised the costs of imported materials used by British firms, who in turn passed on these costs in higher prices. Another example is an indirect taxation by the government, say an increase in the duty on beer, which is passed on by the brewers to the public. There are four factors of this kind which affect the costs of producing goods and services: wages, profits, prices of imported materials, and indirect taxes.[3] Table 10 of the National Income Blue Book for 1974 gives the composition of final output as follows (see Table below).

Thus the table shows that a rise of 10 per cent in the price of imports will result, after it has worked its way through the system in the course of a few months, in a rise in market prices of $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.

The table represents only a static snapshot of one constant in a dynamic interacting process. Statements based on the table cannot amount to a theory about inflation because they do not look below the surface of events in an attempt to discover the initiating cause of the inflationary process. It is simply a statement of obvious relationships and for this reason I call it the

[3] Strictly, the first two are wages per unit of output, and profits per unit of output, or profit margin.

Composition of Final Output 1974*

	£m.	*Per cent of total*
Wages and salaries	52,001	48.6
Profits, etc.	19,888	18.6
Imports	26,813	25.0
Taxes on expenditure less subsidies	8,407	7.8
	107,109	100.0

* Value at market prices of home produced and imported goods and services available for private and public consumption, investment and export.

Source: National Income Blue Book 1974.

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empirical approach. It is widely used to explain inflation.

For example, the Communist Party's July 25, 1975, statement on economic policy drew attention to the following factors which had pushed up prices in the recent past: the increase in indirect taxation and in rates, the tax on oil, the rising profits of the oil companies, and the devaluation of the pound leading to higher import prices, and concluded that Government policy was responsible for the rapidly rising prices.[4] This is only one example of the empirical approach which is adopted widely in the left wing of the labour movement as well as by the Communist Party and the *Morning Star*, in order to refute the capitalist propaganda that inflation is caused by wage increases.

Unfortunately the empirical approach suffers from the fatal flaw, that there is no logical reason for citing only three of the factors and omitting the fourth—wage increases, especially as wage increases of a given percentage have a larger effect on prices than any of the other three factors as the table shows.

The weakness of the empirical approach is shown by the example of the TUC General Council which has adopted this approach. In its pamphlet *The Case for the Unions* it stated that wages were not the *only* factor affecting prices, and when the pamphlet was published in March 1973 the TUC could point to the rapid rise in world commodity and oil prices as the main factor pushing up prices. But this approach leaves open the logical possibility that wages can be the main factor; and in its statement supporting the £6 limit, *The Development of the Social Contract*, the General Council argues that in 1975 wages have become the main factor. The same argument has been used by Harold Wilson and other Labour leaders in support of the Labour Government's £6 incomes policy adopted in July 1975.

The Monopoly Theory

Pat Sloan argues (February 1974) that the change from the competitive capitalism of Marx's day to the monopoly capitalism of our day explains inflation since 1946. The existence of monopoly conditions over most of British industry enables companies to charge prices which are higher than values, and there is therefore "a basic tendency for monopoly-dominated capitalism to force prices up." P. K. Hall also sees monopoly as the heart of inflation (July 1975) and John Purton says "monopoly price raising feeds on itself" (January 1974, p. 25) though for him this is not the primary cause of inflation.

The difficulty about this view is that it does not explain the process of continuous inflation. An increase in the degree of monopoly in an industry can result in an increase in prices, but this will be a once-for-all increase and cannot lead to continuously rising prices as Pat Devine points out (March 1974, p. 80). The conflict theory recognises that the prevalance of oligopoly[5] is an essential condition for inflation, for otherwise employers would not be able to pass increases in their wage costs on to prices as they normally can. But a condition is not the same thing as a cause. As Maurice Dobb pointed out (February 1975, p. 57) "because a number of factors are jointly necessary for a certain result to appear and are to this extent 'conditions' necessary to the outcome, this by no means suffices to constitute any of them the unique and essential 'cause' of that result. For one thing, the alleged 'cause' might come quite late in the chain of events triggered off by the originating change or event." Dobb is arguing that monetary expansion is a condition, not a cause, of inflation, but his remark seems to me to apply also to monopoly.

Moreover, it is hard to reconcile the monopoly theory with the actual course of events. First, oligopoly was widespread in Britain before the war but there was no inflation comparable with the post-war one. Second, if the monopoly theory is correct, one would expect the rate of profit to show a rising tendency; but on the contrary, it has declined in Britain since the 1950s. An important factor in this decline has been the increased intensity of competition resulting from trade liberalisation, growth of multinationals and the increased integration of the world economy. There has been more competition as well as more monopoly.

Fundamentalist Theories

Any theory which seeks to arrive at the cause of inflation directly from Marx's theory of money as set out in *Capital* and his other works on political economy can be called fundamentalist. The best examples of fundamentalism are the excerpts from the writings of Soviet economists (September 1975) but there seem to be elements of fundamentalism in John Purton's first article (December 1973) and in Pat Sloan (February 1975) where they examine the circumstances in which price can diverge from value in Marx's theory of value.

The difficulty about fundamentalist theories is that Marx treated money as a produced commodity, such as gold. But as Dobb pointed out (February 1975) "so long as the monetary and banking system is tied down to a commodity money standard the average price level (as distinct from particular prices) cannot, save temporarily, diverge from the 'normal' level as established by the relative values of gold and

[4] *Comment*, July 12th, 1975. The statement also said that "the budget deficit financed by borrowing affects prices."

[5] Most industries are dominated by a small group of large firms, not by a single firm—by oligopoly, not by monopoly.

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commodities in general." While gold is still used in the settlement of some international payments, it has become irrelevant within modern capitalist economies, where money consists of pieces of paper, and much more important, of bank deposits. Hence a theory of inflation in the modern capitalist world cannot be derived from Marx's theory of money which assumes a commodity money such as gold.

Implications of the Rival Theories

I have argued that the empirical approach does not amount to a theory of inflation and that the monetarist, monopoly, fundamentalist and state expenditure theories are all unacceptable. The most important rival theory to the conflict theory is monetarism, while the empirical approach is of great significance because it is widely adopted by both the right wing and the left wing of the labour movement. Further light is thrown on monetarism and on the empirical approach by examining their implications for policy and ideology.

It is interesting that Marxist monetarism appears to be technically identical with bourgeois monetarism as Cobham admits (though he claims that the technical and the political aspects can be separated). Monetarism received a great impulse from the writings of the Chicago school of US economists of which Friedman is the most prominent, but it remains a minority view among bourgeois academic economists in the US and Britain, though a significant minority whose views have long been championed by Enoch Powell and more recently by Sir Keith Joseph.

Bourgeois monetarists hold that an incomes policy imposed on trade unions cannot work because in aiming against the trade unions it is aiming at the wrong target; inflation is the product of an over-expansion of the money supply. The only remedy is to restrict it. A severe credit squeeze is bound to result in a fairly prolonged period of high unemployment but that is the price that must be paid for having allowed the money supply and inflation to get out of hand.

The attraction of monetarism for right wing conservatives is obvious for it minimises the need for selective intervention by the state and corresponds with their laissez-faire outlook. In addition, mass unemployment is likely to weaken the trade unions and therefore the monetarist remedy is attractive to the whole ruling class for this reason and has indeed been used by the Labour Government to help impose the £6 limit. Monetarism is also attractive to the left wing of the labour movement because it exempts the working class movement from having any causal connection with inflation and the critical condition of the British economy.

But Marxist monetarists are in a difficulty about their remedy. Judging by the contributions of Bellamy and Cobham, they seek to avoid the awkward policy implications of monetarism in the domestic sphere by stressing the role of international flows of dollars and other currencies, thus transferring the source for the creation of an excessive money supply to a vague and mystified international sphere. It is a great pity that David Cobham, their main exponent in this discussion, stated at the outset of his article that he would not try to discuss what policies the left should put forward. It seems that left monetarists hold that a tendency towards an excessive money supply is inherent in modern capitalism, and that there is no remedy for inflation short of the abolition of capitalism. Monetarism thus becomes a useful stick to beat the capitalists with, but offers no basis for an immediate programme which can lead towards socialism.

Implications of Empirical Approach

The policy implications of the empirical approach are of course quite different for its right and left wing adherents. For the right wing, who hold that at the present time wages are the main factor in inflation, an incomes policy is the only remedy. For the left empiricists, who see the main factors as a growth of monopoly profit, or government policy in devaluing the pound or in raising taxes, etc. then it is possible that a sufficiently determined policy of price control could have a major effect. Hence their policy has been to demand a price freeze, combined with completely free collective bargaining (for wage increases are not a main factor in inflation according to them).

But if the conflict theory is correct, this would not succeed, because at the end of the freeze there would be an explosion of stored-up price increases as employers raised prices to restore their profit margins to pre-freeze levels; or if the freeze was continued for a longer period, the progressive squeeze on profit would end in bankruptcy for more and more firms, and more unemployment. The point is that the empirical approach fails to face up to the crucial problem of resources, that is to say, that inflation is a product of competing money claims by capitalists, by workers, by the state and by developing countries —claims which are in excess of the available resources and which are bound to be frustrated by a rise in prices. The left empirical approach in effect *avoids* tackling the problem of inflation. It is this avoidance which undermines the credibility of the whole alternative programme of the left.

Moreover the empirical approach contradicts the experience of many workers who continually observe that a wage increase raises the costs of employers who then raise prices—a rise in the pay of miners or bus workers is followed by a rise in coal prices or fares, and a rise in the pay of local government workers or teachers leads to increases in rates, etc. To advocate a 30 per cent wage increase, for example, and to argue that it will have no effect on prices or only a

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marginal effect, must strike many workers as a dubious proposition. The result is that the workers have been left a prey to the propaganda of the ruling class and right wing social democracy who have seized the opportunity to throw the main blame for price increases on to wage increases.

Thus it is possible to see why, in the autumn of 1975, when the alternative programme of the left lacked credibility because it failed to offer a convincing way out of inflation, there was a readiness to accept the Labour Government's incomes policy and £6 limit. It was accepted, albeit reluctantly and resentfully, because there seemed to many people to be no other way out.

Implications of Conflict Theory

The policy implications of the conflict theory, on the other hand, are that inflation can only be fully overcome by the ending of the class struggle through the creation of a socialist Britain, in which the allocation of resources can be planned and money wages can be kept in line with the volume of consumer goods and services being produced. The crucial problem, however, is the policy to be adopted during the transition to socialism when capitalist power is being fundamentally challenged by a left government. In such a situation the working class might have to exercise some degree of voluntary restraint in its wage demands in order to avoid an excessive rate of inflation which would undermine popular support for the government. Until then an incomes policy must of course be rejected. This position was broadly adopted by the 1975 Scottish TUC when it resolved that "There can be no discussion on an incomes policy until an alternative economic strategy is initiated" covering increased public ownership, redistribution of income, defence cuts, etc.

The adoption of this position would give the alternative programme of the left the vital element of credibility which it has hitherto lacked.

Ideological Struggle

The left empirical approach also has serious consequences for the ideological struggle. The Communist Party and the left could be seizing the opportunity to explain, on the basis of the conflict theory, that inflation is a consequence of the class struggle and of the inability of capitalism to satisfy the aspirations of the workers for better living standards; but this golden opportunity is being daily thrown away. The empirical approach does not promote a better understanding of capitalism and thus raise the level of socialist consciousness. If this analysis is right, then the empirical approach can be fairly described as "economist" with very serious consequences for the movement.

The consequences are serious because, far from raising the level of socialist understanding, the empirical approach tends to isolate the organised trade union movement from other sections of society and to strengthen the existing sectional divisions within the movement. There is therefore a danger that militant "economism" sustained over a long period will actually bring about its own downfall by strengthening the political and ideological position of the ruling class in its search for a viable anti-working class alliance of forces.

The conflict theory avoids these disadvantages. I hope this survey of the six main theories of inflation may help to clarify some of the theoretical issues involved and to bring out the advantages of the conflict theory.

Social Work: A Communist View

Gordon Wardman

I am pleased that the article by Jean Davis and others *Social Work: A Communist View* appeared in *Marxism Today*[1] as I feel that some discussion within the Party on this issue is overdue. Social work, as an occupation rather than a hobby, has undergone a remarkable expansion in recent years. It is therefore timely to consider why this should have happened, since it clearly cannot be solely attributed either to a greater awareness of social problems at an official level or to a greater desire to do something about them. Moreover it is always appropriate for Marxists to examine any field where the number of wage-earners is growing. However, I found the article in question rather trite and lacking in analysis. Moreover I was irritated by the tendency to label any

[1] Jean Davis, Joan Ramelson and Betty Rubinstein in *Marxism Today* April 1976.

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potential disagreement with the somewhat bland views expressed in it as 'leftist' and I trust that this does not foreshadow a trend among our comrades active in social work to copy the style of debate now regrettably prevalent among comrades who work in the field of education.

Definition of Social Work

My first criticism is that the article makes no attempt to define what 'social work' is. This is unfortunate as there is a widespread misconception within the labour movement (hinted at in the article) that the modern social work agencies can be seen as the direct descendants of a dual tradition of private philanthropy and official 'relief'. Historically this is less than accurate. The lineal descendant of relief systems such as the Poor Law is the Supplementary Benefits section of the Department of Health and Social Security which makes no claim to be a social work agency. As for private charities, they continue to flourish in areas where state assistance is non-existent (e.g. provision of life-boats) or inadequate (e.g. helping the homeless).

Social work agencies *per se* are a comparatively modern development. In Britain they tend to be either fully integrated into the state machinery (the two main examples in England and Wales are the local authority Social Service Departments, which incorporate the former Child Care, Mental Welfare and Almoner services among others, and the Probation Service; while in Scotland the process has gone further and their Social Work Departments also incorporate the Probation Service) or dependent upon that machinery to a greater or lesser degree either for referrals (e.g. voluntary hostels) or by virtue of formal recognition in legislation (e.g. the NSPCC). The rationale for these agencies is that they exist to help individuals to solve, or at least come to terms with, problems which may range from delinquency to physical handicap (note the implicit denial of the assumption, basic to most progressive thinking, that social problems are social in origin and only capable of solution within the context of society as a whole). The relief of economic hardship pure and simple is not within their mandate. I shall return later to the question of the ideology of the social work agencies and their role within the state.

Social Work Agencies and Progressive Struggle

Jean Davis *et al.* assert that social work agencies can be lumped in with the NHS and universal free secondary education for the purpose of stating that: "All such advances in social legislation represent a gain for the working people of this country, often only won after long periods of concern and struggle".

This assertion, that social work is a good thing because the working class had to fight for it is then used as the main plank in their argument that such agencies, whatever their present deficiencies, are basically benevolent in intention and that the main concern of Communists working within them should be with 'good practice' (which I presume means professional standards). Now quite apart from the fact that such an argument is weak and illogical in itself, I would question its factual accuracy.

It *is* a historical fact that the labour movement fought for the NHS and for decent education (and the fight continues) but I would welcome chapter and verse on when any section of the working class ever demanded a Probation Service or Child Care Officers or NSPCC inspectors. It follows, I think, that if social work agencies were *not* set up in response to working class agitation, then the ruling class must initially have had some reason to favour them. This may not in itself tell us anything about social work practice today or the forms it could assume in the future, but it puts the struggle of progressives within the social work profession in a somewhat clearer historical context.

Jean Davis and the other comrades reject the view that working in the social services means 'propping up the system' but they fail to make it clear that several fairly distinct sets of views can be covered by this blanket phrase.

"Propping up the System?"

To begin with there is the view (often associated with the IS-controlled magazine 'Case-Con') that the social worker is indistinguishable from the policeman as an instrument of repression. Now this view is, of course, simplistic and reflects the very crude ultra-leftist picture of all bourgeois states as fairly primitive edifices of repression on the model of Tsarist Russia. In fact social workers do not carry clubs, wear uniforms or arrest people and their outrightly repressive functions are in this sense peripheral. However, this extremist position does contain a grain of truth which should at least make us vigilant for the future.

It *is* true that social workers do have the effective power in certain circumstances to take people's children away, commit people to mental hospitals and even to put people in prison. Working people have a right to query the use of these powers and to resist any attempt at their extension. How many people know that the report "Young Adult Offenders" from the Advisory Council on the Penal System included a provision that would have allowed a probation officer in effect to order detention without trial for up to 72 hours in certain cases? It is revealing to note that it is the Probation Service, the most overtly authoritarian social work agency, that has the highest proportion of trained staff and which has been sheltered, along with the police, by the government from the full blast of the cuts in local authority spending.

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Another view sometimes advanced by radical social workers is that they are employed to 'paper over cracks' in the system. Again I would hesitate to reject this view outright. There is no doubt that sheer economics must enter into ruling class thinking when it is cheaper to keep someone out of a children's home or in sub-standard accommodation and to offer as a token alternative the provision of social workers in the community. It now costs (at a very conservative estimate) over £50 per week to keep someone in prison as opposed to a few pounds to keep him on probation.

To take another example, one of the results of the 1959 Mental Health Act has been to turn a lot of quite ill people out on to the streets with only a nominal attempt at 'community care'. Faced with this kind of cynicism at the highest level, many social workers come to see themselves as 'social control on the cheap' or 'screws on wheels'. Nevertheless, I agree with Jean Davis that, if advanced as a total explanation, this view owes more to crudely mechanistic economic determinism than to Marxism. Besides, in the bourgeoisie's terms the cost of a few more prisons or mental hospitals would be little to pay for a quiet life (not that there is much evidence that rich people are the major victims of petty criminals or dangerous lunatics, but it would not do to say so at a Tory Party Conference).

Agents of Social Control

I personally believe, unlike the authors of the article, that social workers *are* agents of social control but my view of their exact role is somewhat different from either of those outlined above and leads to slightly different conclusions.

It is a standard, and quite successful technique of bourgeois propaganda to suggest that its apparatus of control is somehow eternal and unchanging, but this is false. Even such obvious means of coercion as a standing police force and prisons (in the sense of 'houses of correction' rather than temporary gaols for those awaiting trial) are largely 19th-century innovations. As capitalism moved from its 19th-century *laissez-faire* period into its modern monopolistic form its reliance on the state increased, and the state apparatus grew, developed and diversified in proportion. The emergence of social work agencies represents a fairly recent aspect of this development.

I believe that this process can best be understood in terms of the concepts developed by Antonio Gramsci. Rather than preserving its day-to-day power by displays of crude force, the British ruling class has increasingly come to rely, through its control of the state apparatus and its use of its own 'organic' intellectuals, on persuading the bulk of the population to accept its class view of the world and hence to acquiesce in its rule. The process of preserving the bourgeoisie's hegemony is in practice a complex and multi-faceted one and social workers are in no sense unique in being involved in the necessary intellectual dirty work. What makes them unusual is that they are reserved for the more extreme situations.

Social workers are selected and trained precisely for their ability to communicate successfully at different levels. A recent recruiting advertisement for probation officers described them as 'go-betweens' (anyone familiar with the private and exclusive language of either the legal profession or of criminal sub-cultures might have felt the word 'interpreters' to be more appropriate!). This description could be accurately applied to all social workers, but in a slightly different sense to that intended by the advertisement.

The social worker, though characterised purely as a 'helper' of the inarticulate, is more fundamentally an intellectual worker organically linked to the ruling class and with a mandate to act as its agent in asserting the universal correctness of the ruling class's ideas in the various nooks and crannies of civil society, in particular the most neglected areas where such ideas are slowest in penetrating. In a sense they are almost the secular equivalents of priests, the people who traditionally disseminate complex ruling class ideas in a simplified form to the far corners of society. Indeed it may be that the rise of social workers in our largely secular society reflects the declining status and influence of priests. Doctors by contrast are a high-status group and it seems no accident that social workers have tended to ape aspects of medical ideology, especially in the 'disease-model' of social malfunctioning and a jargon derived from it ('diagnosis', 'treatment' etc.).

At any event I am convinced that the social worker's role, as a 'go-between' or link in an ideological chain, is often quite successfully fulfilled. The song "Gee Officer Krupke" from 'West Side Story' (in which a gang of delinquents joyously repeat all the reactionary, fatalistic and, of course, contradictory academic 'explanations' of their behaviour) can be paralleled in real life. And I am hardly the first person to note that the ruling class have been very successful in gaining ideological acceptance of their class notions of law and order and justice even among those who in practice habitually flaunt them (e.g. criminals).

I have already made a passing reference to priests. To make another religious analogy, there is some similarity between the ruling class's present use of social workers and its use, in the 19th century, of overseas missionaries. It often puzzles outsiders that social workers cheerfully admit to an appallingly low 'success' rate and that this situation is tolerated by their employers. The reason is that the real object of the exercise is disguised. Missionaries too had an

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abysmal record in terms of their ostensible objective (the most famous of them, Dr. Livingstone, by some accounts made no lasting converts at all), but this did not worry the European ruling class for they were more concerned that their pernicious ideas should be spread thinly and widely. To this end the missionaries were an adequate complement to the Gatling gun, the two together forming a joint introduction to the European way of life.

In our society social workers (and others) similarly complement the police force, forming the carrot and the stick of social control. There is an additional point of comparison. Missionaries such as Livingstone were at least as useful to the ruling class at home as they were abroad and there is no doubt that our social services today have an equally important window-dressing function. They also, on occasions, provide a useful scapegoat as the Maria Colwell case illustrated.

I have suggested, somewhat sketchily because space is limited, that social workers are in business to preserve the hegemony of the ruling class every bit as much as the state's more overtly punitive forces. But here we encounter an obvious contradiction. To begin with social workers do not form a homogeneous group in terms of their background and ideological outlook. But it goes deeper than that, because selection procedures for the job are carefully designed to weed out applicants with rigid and authoritarian views as being unsuitable (the question 'unsuitable for what?' immediately springs to mind) and training is geared towards enhancing self-awareness and removing any vestige of hardness of mind or heart. The end-product, the trained social worker, lends itself to ready caricature as a self-critical neurotic unable to find any form of human behaviour, however bizarre or repellant, wrong, unnatural or blameworthy.

In this respect social workers are probably quite unique, for to the best of my knowledge no similar approach is taken to either the selection or training of any other group of workers, even in jobs where the caring and helping element is supposedly paramount (e.g. nursing, psychiatry, the police force). The explanation for this peculiar fact would seem to lie in the recent obsession among social workers in achieving an accepted professional status. Professionalisation, of course, implies the carving out of a distinctive ideology as well as a distinct field of operation, and in the case of social work a non-judgemental concern for the value and uniqueness of the individual was seized upon, partly because it had not seemed to concern existing professions overmuch and partly because it could be justified in terms of alleged historical continuity. Whether this explanation is true or false, the result is that the suitable social worker, suitably trained, is peculiarly unsuited for his actual job, where he is called upon not so much to appreciate the intrinsic value of square pegs but to knock them gently but firmly into round holes.

It is at this level that unease and unrest among social workers tends to focus. I believe this trend will become more evident as the proportion of social workers from proletarian backgrounds grows (as it is doing) and as the economic crisis drives our social services ever deeper into chaos. It will become more conscious to the extent that Marxist ideas gain ground within the profession.

Developing Struggle

To sum up, the social worker is paid to integrate other workers into a framework of control and ideological acquiescence which he may well not agree with himself. More and more often he is starting to ask basic questions. Just how 'normal' is the normality of the greedy, anarchic and repressive society to which he is attempting to make 'abnormal' people conform? How 'moral' is its morality and how 'valuable' its values? No doubt these embarrassing (to the ruling class) questions could have been avoided by more appropriate selection and training of personnel. However, as I have indicated, the ruling class allows its social workers to be selected and trained on a false basis, perhaps feeling that by doing so they somehow camouflage the true nature of the beast. By this action they have placed a contradiction at the heart of employment in the social work agencies, these latest outposts of the ever-growing bourgeois state, around which, I believe, discontent will ripen into struggle.

Revolutions are not made by small groups of key productive workers in a head-on collision with the forces of capital and still less by tight-knit bands of armed elitists, but have to be fought on all levels of economics, politics and ideology by the great mass of the working people, and, as Lenin said, it is the duty of the revolutionary party to "dispatch units of their army in all directions".

In our society the areas of struggle will be diverse and, in some instances, quite novel, and it is necessary for every group of workers, and others whose interests conflict with those of monopoly capital, to attempt to analyse their own position, expose the contradictions within it and plot on what ground their battles will be fought. Only by this process will we be fully prepared for the complex struggle to achieve socialism in Britain, a struggle in which we need to add the advantage of position to the advantage of numbers. In this context it is not enough for Communist social workers to merely defend their profession and demand the opportunity to do better work within it. We need a strategy that will enable us to win over, or at least neutralise, our co-workers and to call into question the whole basis upon which social work is practised in this country.

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